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✧ GOOD-BYE, PROUD WORLD ✧

GOOD-BYE, PROUD WORLD

BY

Margaret Emerson Bailey



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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1945

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*"Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I can not hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice."*

T. S. ELIOT from "Ash-Wednesday"

✧ PART ONE ✧

CHILDHOOD

CHAPTER I

Except that her grandfather lived in the same house and shared the same big rosewood bed, Meg would not have known that he knew her grandmother to speak to. Only once a year he asked Grandmother just one question. At Thanksgiving dinner which took place at his house, he stood up and poised his carving knife above a giant turkey. Then he would say in the gentlest voice, "What can I give you, Mrs. Simmons?"

"You know I always take the breast," Grandmother would reply from the other end of the long table.

After which he would slice off two of the thinnest slivers edged with crackling and place them carefully on a big Canton plate.

Grandmother was the person whom Meg could be left with safely. Not that Meg minded. On those afternoons she was with someone who understood that there were better things than toys. Whenever she got twichety, there was a fat brown album that unbuckled and that could make Grandmother stop her work for the whole afternoon.

"There he is," Meg would begin. For there he was—the Senator—by far the grandest person in the Simmons family. In all the years before she was alive, everything that had ever happened had to do with him. Even in his photograph he had a high, fierce face that she knew would look right over her at somebody who was important. It seemed queer to think that Grandpa was his son.

"The Senator had the finest ruffled shirts in Washington," she would begin.

"Who was it said so?" Grandmother would ask.

"Somebody in his heyday." Heyday was a word that stuck in mind.

"It was Daniel Webster," Grandmother would say. "At a big state dinner, he remarked that he didn't think that his own ruffles had been hemmed with quite so fine a seam."

"Where did he hail from?" was Grandmother's next question.

"He worked his way from Little Compton to a cotton mill."

Meg liked to say that, for Little Compton was a place she'd been to. It was where she went in summer to the seashore and when she said, "He worked his way," she felt that she was trudging through the sand dunes till Grandmother interrupted her and yanked her back.

"The Senator was a great man in his day. A smart one, too. Your father's people had to come to him for favors. The Baileys with their grapes in green-houses . . ."

That was one of the worst things that Grandmother could find to say about Meg's father's family. Meg was always thankful when the story led back to the Senator.

"For well-nigh forty years," Grandmother would start, "he had Rhode Island in his pocket. He was a great man for high tariff and he was the first to frame the Stamp Bill. We'd have had a mint of money if he'd had the sense to use a stamp himself and hadn't franked his letters home."

"What's a mint?" Meg always had to ask.

"More money than you'll ever see if your father has the managing."

Each time that remark was made it hurt. The child turned quickly to a story that she knew Grandmother loved to tell.

"The Senator," Meg would say, "was a great friend of Lincoln's. Lincoln got shot. He got shot when he wasn't looking. He was sitting in a red plush velvet box just like the one I sat in when I went to *Rip Van Winkle* with my father. Where were you, Grandma, when you got the news?"

Meg knew the story word by word but she loved to hear it over.

"When the news came I was standing in the summer kitchen." As Grandmother spoke, her eyes looked way off from the album. "I turned to and boiled some bark and mixed a batch of dye right in the washtub. 'There,' said I, 'that's the best that I can do for him.' I can remember plunging my silk poplin in. I thought a sight of it, but in it went. It took all night to get the plaits in shape and press the tucks but by morning I was dressed in black. So were the others too," she always finished grudgingly.

"But by then the Senator was dead . . ."

"That was one blessed mercy. He'd already had enough to break his heart."

At that she'd pause until Meg asked, "What broke it, Grandma?"

"It's as well that you should know and get it straight." Grandmother's words came slowly at this point. "A great evil that he'd done struck home and shamed him. It was greatly to his credit that he took his sin to heart and died."

"What made him sin?"

Meg waited for the sound of the next words.

"The ways of Sodom and Gomorrah. They weren't the ways of the Church Common down at Little Compton. He went gallivanting South with Henry Clay and got mixed up with all those Southerners. The very minute that he'd seeded the rye field to lawn, I knew where he was headed. I didn't have to wait to watch him build the Homestead."

"The very Homestead where I go," Meg would interrupt; for she knew just how it looked. Set high up on a hill and framed by dense green trees, it stayed in mind as being snipped by scissors out of cardboard. Even from way off, the four white pillars spaced across the front stood sharply out as they towered upward to the roof. Once inside that dim, chilled, empty house, what Meg liked the best was the State dining room. She used to wonder just how people ate in state and she loved the crystal sconces and the chandeliers and the ivory papered walls that had turned as yellowy as an old party dress which she had watched her mother pack away.

"Did it look beautiful?" she'd ask.

"It looked as though it cost a sight of money." Grandmother's voice would sharpen for the difference. "It seemed as though no Senator had any business dwelling there and tricking it all out in war time. But I never thought he'd use his influence as though to take a common bribe."

"What's a bribe?"

Try as Meg would, she couldn't get that clear, though here her grandmother would turn and look at her through spectacles.

"Don't you ever get to think," she'd say, "that you can pocket

something just for nothing but your say-so. Not unless you want to die of shame."

Back they were at the old ending. It never came out differently.

"Did nobody ever speak to him again?" Meg would inquire.

"He couldn't bring himself to speak to anyone," Grandmother'd say. "That's worse. He couldn't even bear to face his mill hands. It got so he wouldn't show his face outside his house by day."

"But before he died, he came to see you once. It was when my mother was a baby."

"Yes," Grandmother would admit. "I can see him plain as judgment. In beside my bed he walked and sat right in the rocker near me. 'Mary Jane,' he said, 'I never did so much towards fitting out your husband. I was always sending him to country schools where he'd pick up the vote. But Sam's as good as gold. That ought to tell you thieving isn't running in the blood. 'Tisn't likely any child of yours and Sam's will take to it.' Maybe right there at the close I could have made it kinder, but recall that I'd had weeks to brood in. 'Sir,' I said, for that was what I called him, 'I'll take care that my young ones learn what's common honesty before they get their schooling.' Well, iron don't bend. It breaks. I knew his spirit had been broken when he rose and went away. But there was nothing different I could say."

At this point Grandmother would sit thinking until at last she turned to the Senator's eight sons. Not that she ever wasted time on the last four. She took no stock, she said, in any of the second brood. Of the earlier group, Meg knew the stories all by heart.

First came James—at eight years old. There he was in a frilled shirt with a soft collar and white waistcoat. In this photograph that had been taken of his portrait, he looked like little Rollo in Meg's own book that had gilt letters and a faded purple cover. He had plump apple cheeks, a mouth that smiled, and eyes like dark, round pools. And when he'd grown to be eighteen, according to the story, he'd gone traipsing out to California for gold and been eaten up by wolves. His bones had lain bleached and unburied in the sandhills till a miner had come by with a pickaxe and shovel. The miner had chanced on a gold watch that had

been just enough to tell him where to send word home. That story chilled Meg to the bone.

On the page opposite from James was Seabury. He was in his Northern Yankee uniform and he wore epaulettes; a word Meg liked for the fringed tabs on his shoulders. He had dark side-whiskers and a sword and a long knotted sash. He had come from Manassas with a bullet in his spleen which was a most mysterious place inside of him. Once that he was home, he lay in bed and groaned aloud. You could hear him over the whole house.

"You used to nurse him," Meg would say. She knew how much Grandmother loved to tell about it.

"Yes," Grandmother would start. "Every day I held a bowl of scalding water while Dr. Bogert probed to find the bullet. I let him see I wasn't one to flinch."

Great-uncle Seabury was still alive and he had managed to hang on to all his money in the Simmons failure. At first he'd run the old stone mill in Lower Simmonsville. Then because Great-aunt Mary-Seab had died and because he was a man of sentiment, he could not abide it, living here in Providence. He now lived in New York and every year he sent out invitations to his wedding anniversary, though no one in the Simmons family had ever felt that they could afford the trip.

Walter, on the next page was dead, but Grandma had a lot to tell about him.

"Seem's though," she'd say, "that I'd no sooner get back home and take my outer things off than up the Simmons sleigh would drive again to fetch me back. And there'd be Walter with his coat all trimmed with astrakan. Of the Simmons men, he was the handsomest."

"Then I should think you would have married him instead of Grandpa."

"When we met I was already pledged," Grandmother would explain. "Besides, Lizzie was the better one to manage him. He'd come to take her out in his new rig and be as proud as Cuffey. But even when he'd hitched up to the hitching post, like as not she'd tell him that she'd changed her mind and wouldn't go."

Meg knew her Great-aunt Lizzie, who lived across from Grandma on Benevolent Street, and sometimes she had to sit beside her

on a little hassock. It was all the child could do not to stare up at the rabbit-pink parting in the old lady's snow-white hair or at the dark-blue clotted veins that ran along her hands or at the sunken hollows at the bases of her thumbs.

But in the photograph was a young lady who was showing off her ringlets and her long pendant earrings and a dress cut in a curve that bared her rounded, sloping shoulders.

"Did she truly look like that?"

Grandmother's answer each time was the same.

"I ought to know, for I stood up with her when she was married. I was carrying your mother and I had to have an extra breadth let into my best dress."

This was a puzzlement. Try as Meg would to follow fact to fact, they made no sense. It was better to go on.

"Once you must have liked Aunt Lizzie."

The answer to this was a quick sharp look. Then:

"I guess I worked my fingers to the bone to help her to go housekeeping next door to me. Well, came the time, I'd work my fingers just as hard to move her t'other side of town."

When Grandma shut her lips into a hard, straight line, she'd finished with a person. Besides, on the next page, there was a photograph that was Meg's business. She was going to turn to some one of her mother's age; to Cousin Anna dressed in a white party dress and looking downward at a rose held in her lap. Meg hated her. With her palm pressed flat upon the picture, she meant to shut her out from sight.

And always did. And always her grandmother said:

"Let's have a look at her."

"No," Meg would cry. "She had a great big fancy ball, and she only asked my mother in to watch her dress. She never asked my mother to her party."

At this, her Grandmother would laugh and say, "I'd know that you were my own flesh and blood."

Or sometimes, but only if she felt like it, she would give this page a different ending.

"I don't know what possessed her to be hateful. But Anna seemed to feel she had to spite your mother. She'd always taunt her with having to go in and out the door belonging to a double

tenement and not living in a single house. One thing I'll say for your own father. He didn't feel himself too good to come here courting on Benevolent Street. Whatever else, the day your mother took his name, your Cousin Anna had to swallow down her pride."

Meg loved the ending to that story. It came out right just like a fairy tale. Besides, for once it had her father in exactly as she wished to think about him. It was he who'd turned her mother into a princess who could ask Cousin Anna in to watch her dress.

Meg was eager now to reach her favorite picture. Only three more photographs were in the way. For one of the double pages was a blank. A faint gilt scrollwork edged an empty space of faded blue. Once when she'd asked who had been taken out, Grandmother had said that she was never one to fancy looking at herself. From the way she spoke, anyone would guess that there was more to it than that.

Facing where she should have been, was a strange handsome man who somehow had become Meg's grandfather. He had dark, wavy hair instead of white. His shoulders didn't sag. His mouth showed lips that met and didn't crumple. And his eyes looked straight ahead, not down. He seemed a person who'd have lots to say. Yet Grandfather never spoke at all till he was spoken to. He sat off in a corner by himself and seemed to feel that he was in the way. Of him, Meg heard the story only once. That once, however, was enough to leave behind the sense of what had happened. Many of the words she never could forget.

The Senator had died. All by themselves the family had buried him out in the little graveyard just beyond the Homestead. But the mill hands had got wind of what was happening and there they were at a respectful distance at one side. No sooner had the Simmonses got home than Grandfather had made them troop into the parlor. He'd been fixing things in his own mind. Nothing would do but that the Senator's wife—his second wife—must take her rightful place beneath the portrait of her husband and that the first and second brood should range themselves at either side. Of the first brood, you might say that there were only Seabury and Walter, since Grandfather, according to the story, had kept waltzing up and down as though he was possessed. Grandmother had

had no notion what was coming even when he'd started in to speak. There she'd sat as careless as you please, smoothing out a plait in her black dress until she'd heard him drop some word about a mortgage and had straightened up. For mortgage was a word to make you fear. Nobody that she'd ever known had had one placed upon his roof-tree. If her husband meant that he'd gone to work and threatened her own house, she meant to move right out even if she had to do the moving. He hadn't, but Grandfather had done something worse. He'd sold his own new mill; he'd scraped together what he had to pay his father's debts and to honor what he could of all that waste and foolishness. In return, he owned the Simmons Homestead. But now that the Senator was dead and there was no one to protect his widow, a log fire was as good a place as any for a record of that business. Out of his pocket he'd whipped an envelope with a red seal and "There," he'd said, "that ends it."

Grandmother had watched the paper curl and burn and she had kept her silence till they were alone. Then, "Sam," she'd asked, "was my wedding dowry in with what you pitched away?" She'd known it was because he wouldn't answer. "There's such a thing," she'd said, "there's such a thing as thieving from your wife."

The way she'd told that story had scared Meg dreadfully. Lest she hear it told again, she hurried by. And save for that once, Grandmother seemed glad to turn to her two sons, two little boys in jackets just alike with buttons down the front.

"I wasn't a great hand at tailoring," she'd say, "not when I started in. And I never thought I'd have to cut your mother's wedding dress. I had to screw my eyes up tight before I dared to take the scissors to a breadth of silk."

Meg's mother's wedding dress! There it was on the next page, the loveliest dress in all the world. And above it was an outline of a face turned sidewise—a face Meg knew by heart. She could feel her finger want to trace it as she looked at it. She knew the touch and feeling of the hair that was so light it didn't show except where there were ripples. She knew the coolness and the firmness of the cheek.

"There's my mother," Meg would call out proudly.

"Yes, poor young one," Grandmother would reply.

"She isn't a poor young one," Meg would almost sob in protestation.

But there wasn't any use. Grandmother's mouth would only clamp the tighter and the next time that they reached this page the argument would be the same.

"What on earth are you two doing?" Often enough Meg's mother would break in on what had turned into a silent struggle.

"Tussling over you," Grandmother would answer. "Meg's got her own idea of you. You'd better see she keeps it and not go sacheting round the town."

Sacheting round the town! Whatever that meant, Meg was not allowed to puzzle over. Her mother always came in in a hurry and somehow she made the other person seem to lag.

"Get your duds on," she would say. "We've got to scamper."

And while Meg pulled and yanked and got the buttons wrong, her brother would stand waiting with her mother. He had on his long brown leather leggings and his reefer and a dark blue sailor cap that had gilt letters on it. Meg had heard enough about his looks. Because his hair was curly and not straight, because it was "sunny" and not brown, he should have been the girl. His hair was simply wasted on a boy.

But Meg knew too that her mother looked still nicer when she had him with her. Somehow he changed her color till it was, if anything, still lighter. He made people wonder that she had a child of his age and still seemed so carefree. People said that when they stopped them on the street.

At last Meg would be dressed. Her felt hat with its ostrich tips would be placed upon her head and its black elastic snapped beneath her chin. Not that Grandmother ever lent a hand. She wouldn't help, she said, to rig a youngster out in that outlandish color. Whoever heard of putting "punkin yellow" on a young one? Had Meg's mother ever had to wear a coat that looked like a freebooter's?

"No," her mother'd laugh. "I looked like Dotty Dimple going off to Sunday School."

"And a good, likely place to go to, too. If you had to send this young one, then you wouldn't dress her like a heathen."

"But you are a little heathen, aren't you, Darling?" Mother'd say to Meg as she finished the last button and started with her to the door. Then before they left, she'd turn to Grandma.

"You'd no more desert us than you'd fly. Let the infants have a good attack of croup and you'd be the first to heat the kettle for me. Why, you'd even have a pleasant word to say to Mr. Bailey."

Mr. Bailey. That meant Father. He was the one who went for Grandmother when Meg was sick. He was the one who seemed so glad to have Grandmother standing by the bed and stirring up some water in a tumbler. He was the one . . .

Before Meg got it straight, her brother would be outside on the steps. Her mother would have Meg by the hand and be calling back through the half-opened door.

"I hope my chickabiddy didn't bother you. Thank you for keeping her so safe."

CHAPTER II

Meg's father closed a little dark-green book that had gold letters on its cover. He had just read her "We are Seven." It was her favorite poem, but she liked it only for one line.

"Tell me again," she said, "about the little porringer."

"'I take my little porringer and eat my supper there.' You like that, don't you?" He was looking at her. "I wonder if you know the reason why."

Meg did. It was because she knew the way it felt to feel the bowl fit in her hands; because she knew the way it felt to know that it was hers; because . . .

"Why, what on earth's the matter, Chickie," she heard her father saying.

"I haven't any *there*," she said. "I've tried, and I haven't any place to go."

"Why go?"

Then Meg saw him look around her mother's room; first at the big white bed she shared with Mother; then at the bureau that

was spread with all her mother's things, last at the desk that held an inkstand and real grown-up writing paper.

"So you're Una's little lion and you haven't any lair." Meg had almost never heard her father speak so seriously. "I see," he said. "I think I see."

After that, he sat looking out the window at the roof tops for a long, long time. She couldn't guess what he was thinking, but she knew better than to interrupt.

"In the scientific world in which I live," her father started finally, "this is known as an experiment. You'll learn to know that all experiments are dangerous. Intentions count for nothing when you're dealing with what's volatile. Things blow up and burst. For all I know I may involve you in a real explosion. We may shatter what is called the family peace. Yet it may be worth a try on one condition. If you get hurt, will you promise not to yelp?"

Meg nodded solemnly. She never understood the words her father used and yet she liked his using them. They took her breath away like a high wind.

In a jiffy, he was leading her up a long flight of stairs that grew ruby colored where it ended underneath a stained-glass skylight. Because her father mustn't be disturbed, she was forbidden to come up here alone. They passed his bedroom door with the white china handle and they were in his study. Before Meg, were two windows that made square pictures of the treetops; and under them was a long table so cluttered that it seemed to have no vacant space. From one end of it, her father was bundling up a lot of papers and piling them on the green carpet. Next, he was stacking up thick, heavy books and great gray blotting papers that had dried grasses pasted over them. On the top of them, he put the brown tin shiny case in which he brought plants home.

"There," he said, "this looks a little like the Bay of Fundy with the tide out, but 'twill serve. Now this space before you is your room. It's bounded on the south by books and on the north by my plant press and microscope. Within those limits, you may turn ink bottles upside down, spill glue, and smear yourself with mucilage. But let a drop of anything get on my microscope. Men have been hanged for less. Far less. Now up you go."

She was sitting perched on a high stool. He was beside her on another.

"Now for the second lesson," he was saying. "It's a tough one. Most of your elders never learn it. There aren't any limits to your room—not really. It's just as big as your own mind. The best thing I know to prove that so, is clean white paper. Never scribble on it. Never violate a virgin sheet."

Before her, he had placed two pencils and a pad. Then very carefully beyond them, he set out three dried and faded autumn leaves.

"Those you're to draw," he said, "so that you make me see the difference. And you're not to lay them flat and pencil round the edges; you're to draw them just exactly as they look. Meanwhile, I've got some work to do. I'll sing out when I've finished."

He was busy with his microscope close by her side.

She sat staring at the leaves. One was like her palm spread out with all the fingers pointing. One had thick fingers like a mitten. The one that she liked best, the one that she liked dreadfully, was like a yellow fan. She had to count the scallops at the top. She had to know the way the ribbings drew together at the stem. She was breathing hard when she had finished, but before her was the best that she could do.

"Let's see," her father said. Then as he stood beside her, "Good," he added. "It's the Ginkgo tree. Non-indigenous. Hails from China and the land of parchment-colored emperors. Though dynasties pass, it lives. Hence ill-suited to America. Seen rarely in these parts, but is grown on the front lawn of Carter Woods, Esquire; financial big-wig. Leaves can be swiped—and are—by Professor Whitman Bailey. They can be stolen by reaching through the grillwork of the iron fence."

While Meg thought over his remarks, he was glancing at the other leaves.

"What about these?" he asked. "You didn't take a whack at them?"

"No," she was afraid to answer. "I didn't have much time."

But the queer thing was that he seemed pleased.

"That proves my point about your room. For the nonce, it seems to be quite spacious. Now then skedaddle down to lower

regions. Only before you go, just this. Whether I'm here or not, this is your sacred precinct. Even sweeping day shall not disturb it; and provided that you keep the rules, why you are free to go and come."

When she came again, her father was at work. But he got down from his stool and helped her on to hers.

"At first," he began, "we must be ceremonious. But court etiquette is not for any scientific shop. Darwin, you see, would have taken it as a great compliment if I'd kept my eye glued to my lens. First, I thought you'd want to do a little furnishing. Straight from Cat's Swamp, I brought you this skunk cabbage. When you draw it, try to get its curve and swirl. Now that in that glass jar is called a leech, more commonly a blood-sucker. I don't want you getting queazy. Why, the great George Washington himself once had a leech applied to him in his last sickness. 'Tis said he died of it. I once had one applied to me in my own boyhood. While it swelled, I felt that it was pulling out my very gizzard, but I lived. Remember that that makes me hardened. Your prize accomplishment would be to draw this ugly fellow so that he makes me feel quite sick."

After this, she always went upstairs excited. She never knew what might be put before her. With spring at hand, it might be a branch with catkins and she would try and fail to do the tassles. It might be a bowl with pollywogs. Once it didn't have a thing to do with seasons. Before her was a little fluted shell.

"That's not for you to draw," her father said. "It's for you to look at and admire. On this created earth, it has the loveliest line there is—except," he paused, "except your mother's ear. That is a remark which proves me an uxorious old man save that Darwin would sustain me in a scientific fact."

Something in her father's voice made Meg uncomfortable and she went on staring at the shell.

Mostly though, he never mentioned anyone she knew about. He wasn't like her grandmother, who liked to say the same thing over with the name it went with. He almost never spoke of people. One day, though, he said he'd have to have a talk with her before she got her feelings hurt.

"Only, first of all," he said, "I brought a turtle home from

college in my pocket. I thought you'd better have one you could watch. But it's not a pet but an example. Now that it's reached that stone, see how it is all shell and no intrusion. Do you think in your own way you could tuck in like that?"

Meg looked at where the turtle's blunted nose and claws had been and was bewildered.

"If," her father said, "you think that you can keep as still as that, you're welcome to your room when I have visitors. You see when they come here, they come on quests as holy as the Grail although it's highly likely that they're off on the wrong track. But knowledge is what they're searching for and on that search, manners are a great encumbrance. These men shouldn't have to stop to be polite."

"Did you ever have to listen like that, Daddy?" she broke in.

"Did I?" he said. "My father would have whaled me if I hadn't. That's why I'm giving you the privilege. At least I've stood and known that I was in the presence of great men. If I tell you that I once saw Huxley plain, you won't know what I mean by it. But far greater scientists than I would have given their eye teeth to have been standing in my shoes. Well, you won't see any Huxley here nor any Agassiz, but at least you'll see true students. You'll be listening to a voice that speaks with some authority, which brings me to my point. Think you can keep still? Then learn to eavesdrop. Keep an ear out. Pick up what you can and make it stick."

After what her father had said about these men, Meg expected them to look a little like the Senator in Grandma Simmons's album. She thought that they'd be fierce and proud, but she was only scared one time and that time by her own father. A neat little man with a white pointed beard had brought a big bundle that was open at one end and had roots dangling. "Here," he'd said as he'd laid it on the table, "these are Burbanks thornless and twice-bearing raspberries. Bailey, you'd better plant them in your garden." "Sully my soil with those," Meg's father had shouted. "I'll have no truck with Burbank or with any botanist turned quack. Since when was it considered decent to be giving Lydia Pinkham compounds to a self-respecting raspberry? Let it have its monthly pains and grow its thorns and bear in season with no damned tinkering with nature."

For all her eavesdropping, that was the talk that Meg remembered best.

But soon her visits had to stop for a long time. There was an evening when she simply couldn't swallow down her supper. The white table cloth stretched out and out in waves and the yellow tips of gas in the round chandelier looked dizzy. Her scratchy toast she hid in pieces underneath the rim of her red waiter and forgot that Bridget would clear off the table and that everyone would see. There in a broken outline round her waiter lay her toast and yet her mother didn't scold. Instead she put one hand against Meg's cheek and bundled her to bed. Nor was it Grandma Simmons whom Meg's father had to go for. It was old Dr. Bogert, who had a flat cold ear that searched for coughs. This time, though, he used one finger-nail to make a long sharp scratch right down Meg's chest. "Well," she heard him tell her mother. "We're in for a good case of scarlet fever. Get the boy out of the house."

Scarlet fever. Meg knew all about it. Not long ago, the little Lippitt boys had died of it; all three of them in just one week. Some of the facts Bridget had made worse when she'd explained. Now that she had scarlet fever too, Meg didn't want her mother out of sight.

"I can't seem to drive the Lippitt children from her mind," she heard her mother tell the doctor.

"She'll forget," he said, "once we've got her on the mend."

One thing was sure. Not even on a birthday had she been allowed to feel half so important. She had her mother to herself. Her mother had to go to bed when she did and do every single thing that she was asked to, all day long. Meg liked being shut in safe with her from everyone and everything outside. She forgot about them almost till the first day that she was allowed to sit up by the window. "Why, there's Grandpa," she cried out. For there he was standing by the elm tree right across the street. He looked as though he'd stood there waiting for a long, long time. When she waved, he waved with a big pocket handkerchief. He kept it up till Mother took her back to bed. The next morning, Grandma came and brought her brother and suddenly Meg wanted dreadfully to see her.

"I do wish that Grandma could come up," she said. "I do wish she'd come and tell me Simmons stories."

"And don't you want to see your brother?" Mother asked.

"No," Meg said. "Not really. He never wants to play with me. He only wants me when he's scared. He likes to have me go out in the shed at Grandma's while he counts the rats."

This Mother had never known. She'd thought that they were busy playing in the sand pile.

"No," Meg said. "We were busy counting rats. I hate their tails much more than anything in Daddy's study. More even than the leech."

While she told about her room upstairs, she thought about her father. What had he done with all her things? Had he lost her little shell?

"I'd like," she said, "to ask him questions. I like the way he talks. I get excited."

"Yes," her mother said, "I'm sure you do. That's why it's just as well he can't come in until we get this whole place fumigated."

But once that that was done, Meg heard her mother say, "You must remember that she's barely seven." She was talking to Meg's father in the hallway. "Don't bring her any leeches. And do remember that she gets exhausted. She can't keep up with a quarter of your words."

What Father brought was ice cream in a white paper box and with a cardboard spoon.

"There," he said, for Mother had gone out and he was struggling with a bib. "I don't believe in swank. When I was your age I had to perch up on a gilt-legged chair and eat my ice cream like a little gentleman. A waiter with a waistcoat striped just like a bumble-bee's stood by and watched. That was at Maillard's in New York. It's a place where people go to gorge. Some day I'll take you there myself and you shall have a tart all filled with little pale green glacé grapes. After that, you'll be a gourmet and you'll disdain the deep-dish apple pie your grandmother's so proud of. You'll be ruined, as they say, for life."

Between slow spoonfuls, Meg stared at her father very carefully. Above his ears, his thick hair was quite as white as Grandpa's. Even his moustache was getting powdered. But the queer thing

was he didn't have old eyes. They had three wrinkles at the corners, but they didn't look way off at nowhere. They looked at her as though what was important was right now.

"When you were my age," she began. Then it seemed so silly to think about him as a little boy perched up on a gilt chair that she stopped short and started over. "Why did you have to get your ice cream in New York?"

"Because in those days, Maillard's was the only place where they had chocolate," he said. "I could have stayed at home and licked vanilla off the dash-board, but my father meant to give me chocolate as a special treat. The trip was thrown in for good measure. We were living at West Point and we had to take a steamboat with two paddle wheels that kicked up a great wake of suds the whole way down the Hudson River. And just to get ice cream. That was the reckless sort we were."

"Why were you living at West Point?" Meg asked, for everybody lived in Providence.

"Why?" he said. "Because my father was an army officer and because it was my birthplace. I got born there to the noise of fife and drums and to the cannonading of a sunrise gun. By every portent known, I should have been a warmonger and not a man of peace. But other forces went to work. There was a fierce old mountain, Crow's Nest, that caught all the thunder clouds and pulled them down in tatters. I could see it even from my crib and I used to wonder what was lying at its base. Well, my father was the one to show me. From the time I could leg it through the brush, he took me off on climbs to find the different kinds of minerals and plants that were around the precipice. That led me on a search I've never stopped."

"I don't believe," Meg said, "that I like my birthplace very much. I don't believe . . ."

"You mean your mother's room." He wouldn't let her finish. "Why every room is a good birthplace if it lets in sunlight. And haven't you three windows? Couldn't you lie right where you are and still be one with Galileo? You don't have to get the answers to the riddle. The great thing is to start in asking how and why. And you might remember this. Every room is a good birthplace if it's in the treetops. They're good to watch the whole year

round. Did you ever notice how the boughs make patterns on this ceiling in the moonlight? Right there above the mirror is a space where the winter buds first show that they have started in to swell."

How did he know? Meg could remember way, way off a moving shadow and a voice.

"Daddy," she asked, "did you ever stay here in this room?"

She had almost finished her ice cream before he answered.

"Yes," he said at last. "As you so mildly say, I stayed here. But that was long ago, almost before you had been thought of."

"I didn't mean," she said, "to turn you out."

At that he laughed, but then he changed the subject.

"Don't you want to know," he started off, "what I have got upstairs for you? It's a Wardian case. That means a small glass house. When the sun beats on its panes, it gets so hot that all the growing ferns and plants inside create a moisture for themselves. It's like a little tropic, a green forest grown in miniature. You can stare down in it and think you are Titania, Queen of Fairies. Or if you're of a hardier nature, you can imagine that you're Good Man Friday and pretend you've left a footprint in the ooze. As a matter of fact there is already an inhabitant. I brought home a grass snake for you. You'll have to find him for yourself, and unless he condescends to move, you'll have a job of it. He's the color of the leaves and you're not meant to see him. It's his business to deceive."

"When can I come?" Meg asked as he undid her bib and took her emptied box away from her.

"You'll have to ask your mother," he replied. "And by the way perhaps you'd better keep the serpent to yourself. She thinks I gave you one thing that you hated."

"No," she said. "I grew quite fond of him."

"Of whom?" Her father asked as though he was bewildered.

"Of my leech," she said.

Her mother had never told her that she couldn't go upstairs, but only that she ought to wait until she was a little stronger. There came a day, however, when she was tired of toys and of everything in the one room she lived in. She could close her eyes and name the things upon her mother's bureau. She didn't even miss

the cut-glass tray that held the amber hairpins or the green morocco watchcase. Even if she tried the game she played with wallpaper, she knew exactly where the pale green leaves and yellow poppy petals didn't meet and were sliced off by seams. Besides, hadn't she been left alone for hours?

Once she was outside, the hall seemed very strange to her and very high and very long. Slowly she slid her hand along the polished banister.

Then above her she heard voices as she almost reached the turn. The queer thing was that they didn't sound like voices that she knew, although she could look up and see her mother's feet. Mother was standing way up on the stairs and there was Father in the hallway overhead.

"You know I give you every freedom," he was saying. "No young married woman whom you know has half as much. I give you every freedom and I do my best to guard you. But when it comes to theatres down in Boston and the midnight home——"

"You might remember that I will come home." Meg heard her mother interrupting. "And there's another thing you might remember. That I've been cooped up for weeks and weeks with scarlet fever. If you think that's any fun just try it."

"No, I don't think that it was any fun," Meg listened to her father speaking, "but I can't let that alter what I have to say. I know how young you are. I know you well enough to trust you. But you can't come home alone from Boston at midnight with a man and not set the gossips' tongues to wagging. . . ."

Somehow, without a single creak, Meg had managed to steal off and get back where she belonged. She knew she didn't want to try to go upstairs again. Not ever. And she didn't want to think about the weeks and weeks when she had had her mother to herself and when her mother had felt "cooped up" with her. When her mother did come in, it seemed as though she'd have to notice that she was not allowed to help or do a single thing. But all she said was,

"All right, little Stuff. That's a sign you're getting better. We'll have your brother back tomorrow. Then, thank heaven, we'll return to normal life."

CHAPTER III

"Darling, your oatmeal's getting cold."

Meg didn't care. Before she started in to eat, she had to finish looking round the dining room. There on the sideboard was the silver water pitcher that kept on getting beads of perspiration even when she put her hand on it and wiped it. Beyond it, was the china tea set that had gilt leaves and flat pale roses, and the Toby holding up his mug and wearing a cocked hat and yellow breeches. Still other dishes were above them on the shelves. Yet Mother didn't seem to understand that half the fun of being down again to breakfast was discovering and then remembering the same thing in the same place.

Meg knew her father understood. He'd put down his morning paper as though he meant to play some sort of game with her.

"Which of our worldly goods do you like best?" he asked.

"These," she said. For before her on the table were two little silver pug dogs that shook out salt and pepper. "I like these best," she said. "I wish I had a dog just like them."

"Lordy," said her father. Then he added, "Am I going to have to buy a pug and a pagoda for my little Dora Copperfield? Must I hear the tintinnabulation of the bells from a toy roof and harness?"

"Yes," Meg insisted. "I want a pug that has a harness. I'll call him Dukie and I'll keep him sitting on the top of the front steps."

"Don't tease the child the moment that we have her down." From the way that Mother spoke to Father, she didn't seem to know the game. "You don't want a dog to worry poor old Pepper, do you? See." She turned to Meg. "He's right below your feet. He's getting tired of waiting to be fed."

Sure enough. When Meg reached down to make sparks on the cat's striped back, he pushed his head up in her hand and showed his vest and black half-necklace. He was anxious for her to get through.

But while she hurried up, she watched her mother between

spoonfuls. That gingham dress with bright pink stripes was her favorite dress, but it looked nicest at the breakfast table. So did her mother's hair. Though Meg had watched it being combed, she couldn't follow how it went from very light to shadows wherever pins held up the braids. At the moment, her mother was finishing her morning mail and reading a long letter.

"I suppose," Mother started off in the voice she kept for Father, "I suppose you think I should know better than to feed my own asterius worm on milkweed."

"I know that joke," Meg's brother shouted from across the table.

"I know it too," she said right after him.

Even though he had a silver whistle on his brand new sailor suit, he needn't boast. She felt that she had been there too when her father had looked into his cardboard box and found his caterpillar shrivelled up and dead because her mother had fed it milkweed, and not parsley. That day her mother had made her father awfully cross by laughing. She'd said he needn't be so solemn; that if the caterpillar'd had the slightest gumption, it would have liked a change of food.

Meg listened to her father speaking.

"Just what poison-fodder," he was saying, "did you think of offering me?"

"Little Compton meadow lands, beach-plum and bayberry and clethra." Mother's words were making bright green pictures. "Salt marsh and cat-o'-nine-tails, hardhack and joepye weed and all your grandifloras and your floribundas."

"With Simmonses for grits," Meg's father interrupted.

"Yes, with Simmonses for grits." Her mother laughed. She didn't seem to mind. "You wouldn't have to have them as your only diet."

"Like fun I wouldn't," Father said.

"How would you," Mother asked, "if you didn't have to stay there with us at the Bundy boardinghouse? And Mrs. Bundy's written that she's found a room for you just up the road."

The Bundy boardinghouse. Those were words Meg had to think about. They meant a bright gold cupola high up in a blue sky and not far off, the whirring pinwheel of a windmill. Somewhere

near, there was a long piazza and a house that had no blinds and leading to it, was a clamshell drive edged with long stripes of purple-red petunias.

They weren't what her father saw at all; for while she was busy thinking she could hear him saying "slop-jars," "mould and mildew," "doughnuts under glass." He was telling all about the things he didn't like, but not a word about the thing she hated.

"Black flypaper in saucers," she put in. Before they died, the flies kept crawling to the edge. She could still see them with their legs stuck out at different angles. They were what she did remember best of all.

"I must say," her mother's voice was just a little cross by now, "I must say that you do make it sound attractive. You don't have to spoil it for the children, do you? Besides, for anyone who's roughed it through the mountains of Nevada just to find one tiny microscopic plant, you give such silly reasons. You won't have to see the Simmonses except at mealtimes."

"I like the Simmonses," Meg's brother said. "Uncle Sam will come down for the Fourth and bring me giant powder crackers. And Great-uncle Si will let me drive his span . . ."

"And Cousin Kate," Meg crowded her voice in. "Cousin Kate will let me pick up shells for her collection. And Cousin Sallie'll let me clip out for her scrapbook. And Grandma'll be there and she'll give me her opinion."

"Won't she just." Meg saw that her father didn't mean to let her finish. "See for yourself," he was saying to her mother. "Once that the Simmonses come back to their old stamping ground, it's just like living with a whole cross section of 'begats.'"

"What's begats?" Meg asked, but they went on speaking to each other. "Then may I get down from my chair and leave?" If they weren't going to talk so that she understood, she wanted to go off and play.

"There," her mother spoke as she reached over to unclip Meg's napkin. "Who says I haven't got a modest little daughter who knows how to make a proper exit? You say 'begat' and out comes the Simmons blood in her and off she goes in disapproval. Well, it's time we all got up. Whit, hurry off to school and be sure you have a pocket handkerchief. Whitman, are you coming home to

lunch? What? You're staying to a Faculty Meeting? Just think over Little Compton and see if you won't change your mind. And Bridget, you may clear the table. By the time you're through, Meg will be ready for her walk."

"No," Meg said. "The doctor says I needn't till I feel like it."

"What do you want to do instead?" Mother was staring at her hard to make sure she wasn't just pretending.

"Go over to the Maxcey's. I'll play where you can see me and I won't sit down on the bare ground."

Though it was warm, Meg still had to wear her winter coat. And yet that didn't matter. She only had to cross the street to reach her favorite place. It was painted white and it was very old and small and shabby and it had, she knew, no earthly business to be just a farmhouse when on either side of it there were big mansions with balconies and turrets and slate roofs. All the same, she liked it; and except for looking at it from her bedroom window, she hadn't seen it—not for weeks. And looking at it wasn't half so real as lifting up the iron latch and shoving back the picket gate and going up the damp slate walk that had plush pads of bright green moss to step on. Just ahead was the stone well with the white lattice front. Once she had opened it, a deep breath of coolness came at her from the pitch-black darkness. If she leaned over and looked down and down, she could make believe she saw the bottom far below the rim of pointed ferns around the edge. There was lots for her to do. She could make blinders of her hands and peek in nearly all the lower windows. She could find fat gum drops on the bark of the old cherry trees or she could pick what her father called moss roses and then try to pry their petals open. Only that it was more fun to sit on the front steps and pretend the Maxcey house was really hers. If it was really hers—a thought came fast and scared her—she would shut everybody out.

For once she'd have a place to be that wasn't somebody's; a place where no one had made room for her or had to be "cooped up" with her. Every single bit she'd own herself.

She was thinking over all the things she'd do when a voice startled her.

"Hello," it said; and a boy bigger than her brother was sitting down beside her on the stoop. He'd put his feet out in the sun-

light so that first of all she saw his shoes. They were polished bright like a horse chestnut. Beside them, hers looked scuffed out at the toes. Above his shoes, he had on wooly stockings that were different from the black-ribbed ones her brother wore. This boy's stockings were a firm, dark green and ended with white bands below his knees.

"Why, look at your bare legs," Meg said.

"That's not polite," he said. "It's rude."

Quickly he clasped his hands around his knees to cover them, but between his trousers and his stockings was bare skin that was much browner than her hand. No boy she'd ever seen went round that way in public, nor did he wear a round white collar, nor did he have black lashes and black hair.

"I don't have to go to school today," the boy was saying. "I have to stay away to show respect. My mother's got to dress in crepe and go to a big family funeral. I'm not supposed to go outside but I saw you from the stable window and I shinned the fence."

While he talked, Meg stared straight at his face. He was gazing way off past the flat green leaves of pipe vines that covered the old summerhouse, even past the silvery high boughs that she had learned to call the poplars. Yet he looked the way people looked when they were smelling something that they liked.

"I don't see anything to smell," she said. "What makes you think there's anything?"

"Because there is," he said. "It's sticky sweet. It's coming from the lindens down on Congdon Street. I can tell trees even in the dark. My mother says that I can thank my Indian blood."

Meg put her hand down in a warm patch of sun. Then she drew around it with a twig until she got up courage.

"My Grandma Simmons is the only one," she said at last, "who's ever had a visit from a real live Indian. That's what she told me. He scared her most to death, she said, by huddling by the chimney-piece and never saying anything. When he'd got warm, he slipped out the door and went the way he came. They don't ever come out in broad daylight."

"I do," the boy flung up his head. Turned away from her, his nose looked very straight and thin and proud. "I do," he

repeated, "because I'm only part an Indian. That's the part that goes way back."

"Then what's your name?" Meg asked.

"Gideon Greene Codman." He spoke very fast before he added, "I live at 20 Meeting Street. I guess you'd better call me Gid."

"Gid." That was easy. But Meeting Street was a queer street for him to live on. Meg knew because it made part of her walk around the square. First at the corner came the red brick block. Then where it ended was a drive between high pines that whispered. Beyond the drive was a smooth lawn where a fountain dripped from tray to tray unless it blew out showers that sparkled. And high up on a bank was a grand house that had the shiniest arched windows and light-blue heavy curtains looped with gold and a great front door that nobody ever opened because, so Father said, it would take Myrmidons to move it. It was a house so grand that it made the little cottage right next door look as though it ought to be torn down at once.

While she had been busy thinking, Gid had taken out a jack-knife and was using the big shiny blade on a thick yellow piece of wood that he had brought with him.

"I know your house," he said. "When you were sick, my mother used to sit upstairs and look across and watch it. I watched it too. One night it was all lighted up. It was exciting. My mother thought you'd died."

"No," Meg said, "I didn't." Then she asked, "Could you look right in?"

"No, not to see," Gid said. "But we could tell which was your window. It's the window at the corner of the second story. There." He was pointing with his jackknife. "Right over there in the big ugly double house with the French roof."

She got the words out fast, "It isn't ugly."

Then she stared across the street at her own house. There was the little square of grass that ran back to the flower bed that her mother was so proud of because her red and yellow tulips were the first to bloom. There were the chocolate-colored steps that Meg looked for every time she'd been to walk and had turned the last corner that led back to Cushing Street. There was one half of the stoop where her father always stood to get his key out. She

could almost see him there, gazing below and showing her the bees that buzzed about his crocuses.

Her lower lip was wobbling yet she managed to get out,

"It isn't ugly. It's my home."

"You don't have to cry," Gid said as he picked up his knife. "Lots of people have to live in houses that are uglier. I guess my mother only wonders how your father stands it after Hillwood."

"Where's Hillwood?" Not that Meg cared, but if she could only make Gid talk some more perhaps he wouldn't see the tear that she felt sliding to her mouth where she could use her tongue.

"Hillwood's in North Providence," Gid said. "It takes my mother a whole hour to drive there with a span of horses. I should think you'd know."

"No," Meg said. "My father always takes me on the horse-cars. He lets me stand on the front platform and sometimes I'm allowed to hold the reins."

"You ought at least to want to know what Hillwood's like." While Gid was talking his strong hands were whittling out a boat that was half-finished. "You ought to want to know," he said again. "Everybody ought when things are in the family. I wish that Hillwood was in mine. I'd like to own the gate-house. I'd live there when I wanted to."

"Why would you?"

"Just to show I could." He was beginning now to scoop out slivers made of tiny shavings. "Besides," he added firmly, "it's too good for any colored coachman. It's much too good for Nancy, the old nigger woman. She's nothing but a slave, a free black slave. Your grandmother had no right to bring her up here from the South."

"My Grandma never did. She wouldn't." Even if Gid stopped his work for good, Meg had to make him listen. "My Grandma Simmons hates the South," Meg shouted. "She never would get mixed up with Southerners. She wouldn't have one in her house. She says they were the ones who led the Senator to sin."

Gid laughed out loud. "Sin," he said, "is just a word they talk about in Sunday school. And anyhow my mother says your father had a coal-black slave to bring him up. Now she isn't anybody's, but the Baileys have to keep her till she dies."

"My father never had a slave," Meg said. Then she halted and thought hard. When her father was a little boy, what did she know about him really? That he'd sat high up on a gilt chair to eat his chocolate ice cream when his father'd brought him on a steamboat to New York to let him eat it; that he'd been born right at the bottom of a mountain that reached up so high it caught the thunder clouds; that there was a room where for hours and hours he'd had to listen and keep still. What else?

She was looking way off at a haze that made the city soft and dim and very far away beyond the treetops. There were the nearer roofs that ran down hill with green round domes behind the chimneys. Among them, she could see the steeple of the Baptist Meeting-House and the scalloped tops of the old Armory. She passed them every time she went down street. But if she could sit here on the Maxceys' steps and tell their names from this far, then she ought to know what people said not just today, but yesterday. If they'd only be like Grandma Simmons and say things over and then over. There were the stories of the Senator. Meg knew that she could start off this minute with the part about his fine-stitched ruffles. She could go on from there. Suddenly she'd reached the part where Grandma said, "The Baileys had to come to him for favors," and a quick thought came.

"Out at Hillwood, do they grow their grapes in greenhouses?"

"That kind of grapes they do." Gid nodded as he went on whittling. "They're only meant to lay on cotton in a basket. They're not meant to touch. But they let me touch the century plant. That's the plant that has a birthday party."

"When does it have a birthday party?"

"Oh, when it gets to be a hundred," Gid said loftily. "It blooms then. That's the only time it tries to. And when they know it's going to bloom, the Baileys send out invitations. My mother gets one. So do lots of other people. Then they all dress up and drive clear out to Hillwood. The flower's on a high stem. It's so far up they have to use a stepladder. The ladies go up first. My mother mounts till she can count the petals. Then she comes right down and has ice cream and ladyfingers. She says your father used to hold the ladder steady for her. Of all the gentlemen she knows, she says she used to like your father best."

While Gid was speaking, Meg could see her mother as she looked when she went up a stepladder. Nobody had to help her. Every time she hung the clean white curtains, she went to the very top and raised both hands above her head while she was straightening out the ruffles. It would have made her cross if anybody'd thought she couldn't do it all alone.

Meg broke off a piece of vine and chewed the end before she spoke.

"I think," she said, "that that's a silly kind of party and I don't believe your mother knows my father, not to speak to."

"She does so," Gid said, and he drove his knife down in the wood till it stood upright. Then he put his boat behind him. "I guess I ought to know. She was the one who stopped my yelling at him. Every time he passed our house, I used to run behind him and yell names. He looks just like a peddler when he carries that tin box hung from his shoulder. I thought he was a tramp."

Meg felt her coat rip at the armholes before she knew that her fists were doubled up and hitting every which way. Light flashed again on her closed eyelids once Gid was holding both her wrists.

"Don't," he was saying. "I don't do it any more now that I know he doesn't peddle anything. He goes out to Cat's Swamp and digs up weeds and brings them home. I know because he showed me. He let me look inside his box."

"He never did," Meg said. She was still struggling.

"Yes," Gid said. "He did when I apologized. My mother made me go straight up to him and say that I was sorry. When I did, he used a lot of funny words, but he sat down on a stoop and opened up his box and let me look."

Meg could see her father doing it. She could hear her mother saying, "I believe you'd sit right down in Market Square and give a lesson to a ragamuffin."

Gid had been talking all the time that she was thinking. He had let go of her wrists and he was saying,

"Shall I tell you which I liked the best? It was the dark red one he called the pitcher plant. It eats up lots of insects and he let me see. He showed me the trap-door that the flies and things get stuck in." He paused for breath and then his voice changed into wishing. "I'd like to have a pitcher plant to own. I'd catch flies for

it. I'd like to wade out in a bog for once and get one. It wouldn't matter if I had to take my shoes and stockings off. That's what your father had to do. My mother says he wouldn't even care if people saw him do it. I wonder if he'd ever take me to Cat's Swamp."

"You can go to walk," Meg said, "with your own father." She didn't mean to have him go with hers.

"No," Gid said, "I can't. My father doesn't walk. He rides. When his mills out in the Valley fail, he always goes down town and buys another carriage. He says that's just the time to make a show. That's why my brother had to go to Yale. Brown doesn't cost enough. When I grow up, my father's going to send me where he pleases. I'm glad it won't be Brown."

But almost everybody went to Brown.

"Why are you glad?" Meg asked.

"Because I'll get away from home. That scares you, doesn't it? But you don't know what my father's like. If I ever get my pitcher plant, I'll have to keep it in a cellar window and I'll have to steal downstairs to feed it. If my father ever learns about it, he'll make me chuck it out. He'll say I'm mucking up the house."

"I have a space that's all my own," Meg said. "My father brings me things to put in it." She knew it was still hers if she could bring herself to go upstairs again.

"Every single thing my father gives to me," Gid said, "I fetch straight over here provided that it's small enough. Then I drop it down the Maxcey's well."

"I think that that's a horrid thing to do."

"All right." Gid had risen to his feet and was standing on the flagstone right before her. "I mean it to be horrid. I never would have told you if you hadn't boasted."

"I didn't boast. I wasn't even trying to." She was very sure of that.

"You did," Gid said. "When I said your father was a tramp, you pitched into me and punched me. That's boasting. It's a way of showing off. You told about your space and the things you had to put in it. You knew I'd like to have them. You meant to keep your father to yourself. You didn't even want to have him take me to Cat's Swamp."

Gid was looking as Meg often felt when she was left behind at Grandma Simmons's and her mother took Whit to a party with her and she had to watch out the front window till they disappeared from sight.

"Some day," Meg said, "I'll let you go along."

Gid's smile was as sudden as his anger.

"Now I'm going home," he said as he picked up his boat and jackknife. "I knew that I could make you promise if I tried to."

"You can't even make me tell my name," she said, "if I don't want to."

At that Gid laughed.

"I don't need to. When I begged like anything to have the pitcher plant, your father said he had to take it home to 'Meg.'"

After he had gone, she sat and thought until she heard her mother call her home to get her lunch and take her nap.

CHAPTER IV

Her mother came right in and started to get something from the closet.

"Who's been sleeping in my bed?" she called as she took down a hat box.

"I have," Meg said. Ever since she'd heard of "The Three Bears" they'd used this story as a kind of joke to end her nap.

"Mother," she began as she'd been planning to for hours.

"In one moment, Darling," Mother said and disappeared.

And there wasn't any use in thinking that she'd promised to come back. Once Meg got dressed, she knew she'd have to go and search through the whole house.

If her search ended in the pantry, her mother would be holding up the little jelly jars to see which ones had kept the sunlight in their juicy colors; and when she saw Meg, she'd be sure to say, "Why, where on earth have you been? You're just in time to get yourself a spoon and have some jam." Then she would keep on looking over her preserves.

But the very worst of all would be if she was doing up the winter

flannels. That, Meg knew, her father minded more than anything. As she started on her trudge, she could hear her father saying, "I no sooner ask you for a serious talk than you start in squirting insect powder." Then Mother would be sure to ask him what he'd said and he'd be sure to answer, "Just mere bosh and twaddle but it might have been the word of God."

If she wouldn't stop for him, she would never let Meg tell her all about the things that Gid had told about this morning. She'd say, "Did you, Dear?" and "Wasn't that exciting?" and it wouldn't matter to her which. In any case, she wouldn't act like Father. If Meg never told at all, she knew that her mother'd go on thinking that she was aware of every thought. "Little girls get bored." That was what she'd said to Father when Meg wouldn't go up to his room again. "The child is tired of plants and snakes." "Is she?" Father'd asked, "I wonder." The queer part was that it was Mother who had left Meg feeling secret and ashamed of what she'd overheard.

Today, she didn't have to search far. As she reached her brother's narrow room, she saw the single window with the great horse chestnut out beyond it. The leaves that she had seen clenched up like fists were now spread palms laid flat upon each other. But where the sunlight did break through, it was catching on her mother's hair and bright gold wedding ring as she sat sewing in the dimness. She looked so still and cool and quiet that Meg began to shape the words she meant to say.

But before she spoke, her mother saw her standing in the doorway.

"Why, little Sobersides," she said, "you've caught me ruining my eyesight. I only meant to darn a pair of stockings for your brother and somehow I began to patch a pair of his old trouser-looks."

"Mother," Meg began as she sat down on a chair and firmly put both feet on the front rung.

"Darling," her mother said. "Don't ever learn to sew. If you learn, you'll have to do it. I did. I never sewed until I met your father. Then when I married and you children came along, somebody made me feel I ought to make your baby clothes. Why, goodness only knows, because your Grandma would have done it

much more sensibly. The moment I got started, I tried to vie with convent nuns or whoever does the finest needlework. You infants looked less like the children of a poor professor than like the heirs presumptive to the British throne."

Then she gave a lovely sudden smile.

"Now that you've grown into a little girl," she said, "I have such fun making you the kind of clothes I never had and always wanted. You don't mind, Darling, do you? Your Grandma thinks it's very bad for you. She says you'll have to fetch up with a millionaire."

She had paused to look for something in her sewing basket; and while she searched, Meg tried to find her tongue.

"When you were just my age," she started.

"I had a simply horrid time," her mother interrupted, as she lifted up her head again. "We were as poor as poverty and I had to wear my brother's coat cut down for me. Then my hair was almost white and your Cousin Hal who was a dreadful little boy, used to call me an albinò like his rabbit. He used to say that some fine morning I'd wake up to find I had pink eyes. I remember how relieved I was when your father told me that my eyes would have to stay plain blue."

Almost never did Mother talk about the time when she was little. If she was asked a question, maybe she'd go on. But she had given Meg a new idea of how to start.

"When Father was my age . . ."

"Darling, he never was to all intents and purposes." Her mother had put her off again. "When we were married, he was twice as old. And before that, he seemed much older. It's only since you children came that I've been catching up. Why, when I first saw him I was just a little tow-haired girl who kept running in and out of Mrs. Whitman's. Why she didn't pack me home, I can't imagine."

"Didn't you ever try to talk?" Meg begged. "Didn't you ever want to make somebody listen?"

"No, Dear, I didn't. Not at Mrs. Whitman's. I only went to hear. Not of course when she first asked me in. Then I thought she was a crazy nice old lady who draped pink ribbons on her widow's bonnets. Besides, there was something mysterious about the way

she wore veils even in the house and never drew the parlor curtains back for daylight and had the smelliest oil lamp that she kept burning in front of a big easel that was covered with black velvet. I'd let her think I'd gone away and then I'd hide behind the easel."

Even though she lost the chance of telling her own story, Meg had to know what happened.

"What did you do," she asked, "behind the easel?"

"What did I do? I listened to all Mrs. Whitman's conversations with her callers. They talked of things I'd never heard of in the Simmons family; poetry and love and a strange gloomy man they called 'The Raven.' Nobody knew that I was listening till one day your father made me laugh out loud. He was so funny that I couldn't help it. Then he found me sheltered by the portrait of Edgar Allan Poe."

"Who's he?" demanded Meg.

"Tintinnabulation, Dear," her mother said. "Poe's word. You heard your father use it at the breakfast table just this morning. That's how culture starts. At any rate, mine did. When your father found I'd never read a single line of poetry, he gave me *Gems from Tennyson*. He brought it to me there at Mrs. Whitman's. It made me prouder than a peacock. I knew I was the only Simmons who had ever owned a book."

Meg thought about her own belongings. One had a picture of a man who was staring at a footprint in the sand. Another had a picture of a pair of legs spread far enough apart to let a crowd of tiny men go on their way between two heavy boots. Another one was *Little Rollo*.

"I own three books," she said.

"Of course you do," her mother answered. "The wonder is that you don't own a whole encyclopedia. That's why I haven't wanted you to learn to read. Your brother's different. He's a Simmons. He's only interested in what he does with other boys. But once you learn to read, your father'll have you dipping into everything; Browning and Sanskrit and Astronomy."

While she spoke, she had been folding up her dark bronze leather needlecase and fitting her gold thimble in its box. Then as she picked up bits of thread and rolled them in a wad, she said:

"I wish your father was the only one wants to teach me. He makes it fun to learn. But why on earth his friends should think that they could make me sit through Boston Symphonies and listen to them reading Swinburne . . . Which makes me think . . ." Her voice had changed to coaxing. "You don't mind, Darling, do you, bringing those three books of yours down stairs and playing with them in the parlor? Dr. Vaughan is coming in a little while to teach your mother all about the Barbizons who sound too dreadful. I think, though I'm not sure, that candy comes along with them; and you may have the sugared violets and the tin foil and the lace doily on the top."

Sure enough, when Dr. Vaughan did come there was a round pink box that had gilt letters on its cover and Meg was allowed to choose one bright green candy like a pea pod with five little peas inside. This she took with her to munch while she sat below the keyboard of the heavy black piano and turned and turned again the pages of her book. It was more fun to stare up at her mother, who was sitting with her hair made light by a dark fan of peacock feathers on a screen behind her. She had changed into a dress the color of Meg's coral beads.

Meg liked to have her sitting there like that, but what she didn't like was to have someone who was not her father close beside her mother and who had a hand that had pale freckles on it. It had a seal ring on the hand that touched her mother's arm each time he showed her something that he wanted her to see.

Meg knew he must have seen her steady scowl, but as though she wasn't there, he said, "Does the infant never smile?"

"No," Mother said. "Her brother does, but she just sits and listens. She's my little brood-owl. Heaven only knows what she's got tucked away inside her head."

"Then," Dr. Vaughan had dropped his voice although Meg still could hear him, "Then isn't it a little foolish of you?"

"No," Mother laughed. "It means you'll have to go on talking of Rousseau and Daubigny and I think it's very wise."

He wasn't half so sure. Meg watched him with his heavy, sandy eyebrows pulled together while his glasses, hung on a black ribbon, dangled down on his white waistcoat. After a while he gathered up a lot of cardboards with brown pictures pasted on them and came across the room to where she sat.

"Don't you want to look at these?" he started. "See the nice cows and woolly sheep and lambs. Suppose you choose the ones you'd like to own."

"I only want to look at trees," she said; for there wasn't any sign of one among the pictures he was showing her. "Trees," she repeated the word firmly, "are the only things I like to see."

"That's her father's training," her mother added quickly. "She's not merely being rude."

Being rude was, Meg felt, exactly what she meant to be, but when Dr. Vaughan had brought her a great book that had pages covered with dark clumps of leaves and twisted branches, she couldn't think of anything to do but look.

"Perhaps our little botanist will look at these," said Dr. Vaughan "and be good enough to find for us an oak, a poplar, and a willow."

To Meg's surprise, he wasn't making fun of her. Right off she came upon a line of poplars that were like the ones she'd seen this morning from the Maxceys' stoop. They were high against the clouds and thin and whispery and they made her think of Gid as he'd gazed past them. There were lots of willows, too; so many that she grew quite tired of finding them. But she had to find the third tree and it wasn't anywhere.

"Mother," she called out at last, "there isn't any oak."

"See Rousseau, Precious," Mother answered. "Can't you read well enough to find a large fat R. Above it, there is sure to be an oak tree. That's the only sort that Rousseau ever paints."

When Dr. Vaughan stood up to go, Meg was still searching. He came nearer, stooped down and pointed to a page.

"There," he said, "isn't that a fine big oak tree?"

"No," she said. "It's not."

"Why, Darling," quickly Mother's voice was near. "Tell Dr. Vaughan you didn't mean to contradict him. I can't let you be so rude."

But though her mother made Meg stare down at the page and told her that she'd have to change her mind, she couldn't. The harder that she stared, the more she saw the branches fit into the trunk with V's just like a maple's.

"I know it's not," Meg kept on saying. "I have to know because my father makes me stop to look at tree trunks."

"Do you think that Rousseau didn't stop and look? He *sat* and looked," her mother said. "He was a famous painter."

But as sure as Meg knew anything she knew the line an oak bough made with its own socket. If that wasn't so, then nothing that her father said was so. Stubbornly she clung to her own knowledge till at last her mother turned to Dr. Vaughan.

"I'm sorry," she began, "to have treated you to such an exhibition. This is the last time for a long, long while that Meg will have the fun of being in the room with grown-ups."

Then after he had gathered up his things, her mother went with him out into the dark red hall.

She wasn't coming back to scold. For ages, now, she wouldn't notice or if she did, she'd say, "Oh, is that you?" and nothing else. Slow step by step, Meg went up the long flight of stairs and sat down in one corner of the bedroom. On the pale straw matting, she spread out her books, but she didn't even see the pictures. She had eyes only for the ruffles at the bottom of her mother's dress. She wanted to creep up and touch them as they swirled around the little chair before the desk. If she didn't dare to do that, she'd have to keep secret all the things she'd learned from Gid this morning. And if she kept them secret from her mother, then she might be anybody's child.

"Why this twilight?" she heard her father's voice break in upon the dusk.

"Meg's been a naughty little girl," her mother said.

"Yes," Meg said. She was already tugging at her father's coat. "I was rude to Dr. Vaughan. Once I meant to be and once I had to be."

"Well," said her father as he lit the gas and sat down in a chair. "That's a tall order, isn't it? 'Meant to be' can wait. But you say that once when you were rude, you had to be. Suppose you try to tell me why."

After she had told him, he put one arm around her and at last he did begin to speak.

"For a moment, let's forget," he said, "about the oak tree's branches. Those are what I showed you. But did I ever tell you much about the color of its autumn leaves? No, I never did because I couldn't. But Rousseau was a painter and he could. If I

tried to tell, I could only give you names of different colors—say burnt umber and sienna and rose madder. But when Rousseau wished to tell, he spread his palette and he squeezed out colors that I've never heard of. Then he took his brushes out and painted a big tree that didn't have the amber of a chestnut in October or the scarlet of a maple. It had the brilliance of an oak on a fall morning; of that and nothing else. That was Rousseau's version of the truth and it's quite as true as mine. It's the same object looked at in two different ways."

He made Meg see bright autumn leaves that were like banners in the sunlight and it was hard to come back to her mother's words.

"Do you think," she heard her mother ask, "that's any way to punish her?"

"I think," her father said, "that it's a way to make her tolerant of assertions. The next time anybody makes a statement, she may wonder if it isn't just one aspect of the truth."

"I want," her mother's voice spoke firmly, "I want a little girl who doesn't have to think, to be polite."

All of a sudden, Meg knew that she was very tired and hurt and angry, so angry that she seized the words that Gid had scared her with this morning. "I'm going to run away from home," she sobbed, "and be where someone wants me. I'm going to run away to Hillwood and live there in the gate-house." She burst into tears.

"Who on earth's been talking?" asked her father.

"Hush," was all her mother answered. Then she did something that she'd said a child of seven had outgrown and took Meg on her lap.

"You mustn't ever think," she breathed into Meg's cheek, "that Mother doesn't want you. Think how lost she'd feel. No other little girl could take your place. She wouldn't fit."

For a while Meg could feel her bang pushed back and then smoothed down again by the hand that had a ring on it. Then when she'd stopped sobbing, a voice was speaking very near.

"When Grandma Simmons lives so close, why did you think you'd run away clear out to Hillwood?"

"Because I'd like," Meg said, "to see the greenhouse and the plant that has a birthday party."

"And when you'd seen them all you wanted to," her mother said, "who did you think was going to tuck you into bed at night and put your light out for you?"

That Meg had never thought about, but

"My father's coal-black slave," she said.

Beneath her cheek, she felt her mother start, but in a moment she was saying:

"A house isn't only things. It's people too. That's what makes our house such fun. Even if old black Nancy tucked you into bed, do you think that you'd have fun at Hillwood with Great-uncle William?"

Meg thought and then she asked, "Who's he?"

"An old Tartar," said her father after a long pause. "An old Tartar who had the honor of directing what he chose to call your father's boyhood. I'm glad you'll have a happier childhood to look back to."

"Will I?" Meg asked.

"Yes, Darling, yes," her mother said. "That's what we're trying hard to give you."

"But," Meg said, "I haven't any greenhouse in the family."

She thought she heard her father laugh.

"It isn't really funny, Whitman." Mother was speaking in her special voice. "Whatever Meg's been told has caught her fancy. Well, she had to learn of Hillwood sometime. I hoped she'd be a little older when she'd have more she could judge by. I didn't want to have it seem too grand. But we'll have her turning it into a fairy palace unless you take her out and show it to her. Surely after all these years your uncle won't object. It's the only thing I've ever asked of him."

"You?" Meg heard her father say.

"Yes," her mother said. "You can tell him that I think it's time the child knew someone in her father's family."

Meg watched her father twirling his two thumbs. "The old gentleman," he said, "is sure to think that we want something of him."

"We do," her mother said, "but since it isn't money and it's not

a favor shown to me, I don't see why he'd mind. You can write him that it's just a little girl who wants to know that there's a greenhouse in the family. That ought to please him. As for Meg, she'll see a greenhouse isn't everything. How can she know unless you take her?"

"But she's pretty young for flesh-pots, isn't she?"

"No." Meg saw her mother shake her head. "It's only people who affect her. And from what you tell me of the family at Hillwood . . ."

"She'll be glad to get back home to Cushing Street. At any rate," Father said, "I'm glad that I'm not taking young Lord Fauntleroy."

To Meg, those last words meant her brother's best black velvet suit with the lace collar.

"What am I going to wear?" she asked.

"You're going to wear," her mother said, "the stiffest, starchiest little petticoats that I can put you in. I hope you'll roll down all the terraces and get yourself well grass-stained. I hope you'll pick the oleanders and the pink camellias and nip the one bud off the century plant. But you'll go about as solemn as a little owl and when you get back home, you won't have a single thing to say."

"Aren't you coming too?" Suppose the Baileys were like Cousin Anna when she gave a party and left Mother out. Meg wondered if she'd have to hate them.

"This time," her mother said, "your father wants to take you by himself because your Great-uncle William Bailey is his family. That's the way I often take you to the Simmonses. It's the way it's always done."

She seemed so sure that Meg began to think of all the things she meant to see until her father interrupted her.

"Would you mind telling us," he asked, "who told you about Hillwood?"

"Gid," she said, "he told me all about it."

But when they asked her his last name, she had forgotten it. It was only when she said how much he'd wanted her red pitcher plant that her father did remember him. Lots and lots of boys, he said, ran after him and yelled out names at him. But only one had wished to see inside his box.

"I know," he spoke at last. "It's the lovely Lily Codman's little princeling. I'm surprised he didn't ride up in a coach-and-four with ten outriders and six equerries."

"No," Meg said, "he shinned the Maxcey's fence. Some day he's coming with us to Cat's Swamp."

CHAPTER V

For some reason Grandmother didn't seem to like the very things that Meg was proud of wearing out to Hillwood, not her new yellow leghorn hat with the blue cornflowers and the scarlet poppies, not her new reefer with the bright gilt anchor on each cuff, not her white dimity dress that she wasn't to sit down in any more than she could help it.

"Before I'd rig my youngster out like that," her grandmother had said when she had come into the house and seen Meg and her father starting off to take the horsecars.

Luckily her mother had been in the room. "It's just the way I always wanted to be rigged," she'd said. "Meg looks just the way I always wanted to."

But Grandmother Simmons had never even glanced again. "Before I'd stoop to flatter some folks that I know of," she had started. Then she had added, "I'd think a body'd have more pride."

Once that Meg and her father were on their way down street, he had said that they could breathe a little easier now they were out of earshot. But in the horsecar, he had barely spoken and even when they had reached the place where they got out, he hadn't seemed to want to look around the way that he did usually. At once he'd led her up a leafy road and then along a high brick, moss-stained wall and all the while he hadn't seemed to notice her although her hand felt hot and moist in his.

At last the wall had two high posts with empty urns on top and a gateway with a dark, closed face. When at last her father had made it open, he took her into a cool woods and stopped at the beginning of a drive.

"We're going in this way," he said. "We'll have to leave the gatehouse where you want to live, till later. If old black Nancy got her eyes on us, we'd have to spend the afternoon. And one thing more. We'll have to slow up on our questions. When you think of the third thing you want to ask, pipe up and speak."

How was she ever going to manage when everything on either side of the wide drive was turning to a question? Reaching way above her head, there were dark, solemn bushes. What were they? They had round, double, fluffy flowers like peonies, only they were bigger and they were a raspberry red.

Those she forgot about, however, when she saw a round black pool. On its still surface were flat outspread leaves that were bigger than pond lily pads.

"Oh, Daddy," she exclaimed, "I saw the most enormous orange fish."

"Did you?" he said. "That's what he's put there for. He's meant to show himself."

And he took her to the edge where she could look right down among the slimy coiling stems and see the waving of pale fins.

It was really she who wanted to go on before her father did. He had spread out his handkerchief and made a seat for her on what he called the coping and kept pointing out new fish for her to see.

"We could sit here the whole afternoon," he said. "We've got enough right here to occupy us."

"No," Meg said, "it isn't what we came for."

"I wish," he said, "it were."

But she had already started off toward where the drive reached out from shade and curved about an open lawn. It was not like any lawn she'd ever seen. Its slopes were longer and more velvety and in its center were two giant trees that were growing out of bowls of shadow. Their brown foliage was tipped with yellow light.

"Daddy," she demanded, "why do they have brown leaves in summer time?"

"Because they're copper beeches, Chickie. They're beeches that have sold out all their wildness. They make what's called 'a fine display.' But only for grand people. Suppose," he asked, "that one of them was set out in the Maxceys' orchard?"

"I wouldn't like it," she said quickly. The very thought made the Maxceys' cherry trees seem old and shabby and the grass unkempt and the little farmhouse dingy and all streaked with rust.

"I wouldn't like them there," she said again and added, "I like them here though."

"Yes," her father said. "I thought you would. And I don't want you taken in by all this splurge and flummery and great tomfoolery. Suppose we just turn tail and make a bolt for it. Shall we? We could get some ginger soda in two bottles and go off and find a nice cool place where we could guzzle it. Wouldn't that content you?"

Then he saw her face was puckering with disappointment.

"All right," he said, "we won't. But I wish that you'd first seen your Cousin Julia working in her garden with her gloves off instead of oleanders growing in a greenhouse. Then Hillwood couldn't hurt you."

"My mother says it won't," Meg interrupted. "She says it's only people who affect me."

"Maybe she's right." Meg felt her father wasn't quite so sure. "In that case," he said, "we're safe."

He had her hand in his and they were getting near a steep grass bank that had a red slate roof above it. The long red roof was broken up by pointed fronts of stone, and there was a great stone tower that looked like one turret of the Armory in Providence. It had the same narrow slits for windows and it had no blinds. Then the tower began to tilt back in the sky and disappear as they went up a long flight of stone steps.

"Take a breather," Meg heard her father say as they reached a terrace between bushes that had flowers like puffs of smoke. He took out his handkerchief and brushed her shoes off with it. Then he did his own and straightened up.

Against a house all draped with vines was a flat open terrace. And on the terrace, a white-haired lady and two quite old gentlemen stood waiting. But they didn't act like anybody out at Simmonsville where Meg was used to having people rush at her and stand her in a better light to see whom she resembled. These people waited till her father brought her up to them. Then they called him "Whitty" and shook hands. Only the lady noticed her at all.

"So this is little Meg," she spoke as though her voice came from a long way off. "I'm Margaret," Meg said. It was the first time that she'd ever called herself by her long name.

The next thing that she knew was that her father had led her to a chair that looked exactly like a big straw bonnet. The open front was filled with the brown, glossy folds of a fur lap robe and from them stuck a narrow shoe sole. It was pale yellow and it was as new as though still wrapped in tissue in a shoe box. Somehow it seemed grander than the gold fish pond or copper beeches. It had a grandness that happened to her only once in a long while and must not be spoiled by using "just for common." So when her father said, "Uncle, here's Meg," she thought of what her Grandmother had called the Senator. "Sir," she stammered out.

A hand that felt like twigs drew her up close and she was gazing at a little wrinkled man who was her Great-uncle William. Beneath white tufts he had gray eyes, but they weren't dim and sad and faded like her grandfather's. They were very sharp and scary and they were looking at her hard.

"I thought," he said, "that you were the beauty of the family."

"No," she said, "I should have been the boy."

"Then what did you think you had to gain," he asked, "by coming out to see me?"

He had motioned to a chair so she sat down and told him what she'd come for.

"Mostly though," she finished off, "I'd like to see the greenhouse. The only other one I've ever seen is at the Swan Point Cemetery. In winter, that's where my father takes me when he needs some plants to give his Botany classes. They save him all the plants they'd have to throw away."

"Don't they ever give you anything?" Great-uncle William's voice grew very loud. "If they don't, somebody ought to whale them."

"They do give me things," Meg said. "After Easter, I can have a potted Easter lily if there's one left over. And after a big funeral sometimes they let me have white roses. They have wires in their stems. They're the ones left over from the wreaths."

"Lordy," said Great-uncle William, and for a moment, Meg

thought he sounded like her father. "You cut along out to the greenhouse," he went on, "and tell McCoid to give you color, swads of it. Tell him he's to slash and hew and slay a raft of roses for you. But only crimson ones and scarlet ones. Tell him if he dares to sneak one waxen bloom among the lot, I'll come straight out and wring his neck for him." He had paused to stare at Meg and then he added, "Why what's the matter with that for an order? It ought to make you feel at home."

"I didn't come to stay" she said. "I don't believe I'm going to stay still supper time."

That was the nearest time that seemed polite for leaving and even that hour seemed a long way off.

"Supper time," her great-uncle said. "That means you're hungry, hungry as the devil probably. Your father'd be about as useful as a newborn babe in looking after any child. You leave your elders here to have their pow-wow and tell whomever you can find inside the house to tend to you. They'll dig up some raspberry shrub and cake and whatever won't upset your inner workings. Go find Cook in the buttery."

Meg didn't dare not go, and with one glance at her father who was busy talking, she found herself inside a vast, dark hall.

How was she ever going to find the buttery when she'd never heard of one? One by one, she started trying all of the broad-panelled doors. She knew that she had found the parlor because it had a big piano and chairs and sofas that were covered with tight amber satin that was dimpled with round buttons and it had a crystal chandelier that was all hung with icicles of glass. Then she found another parlor where the furniture was blue and a dining room that had another dining room inside of its bay window, and a pantry where the shelves were filled with platters meant for turkey and were all edged with gold.

Finally she had tried all doors but one on this side. After she had turned the knob to this and opened it, before her stretched a rug that had the dark and lovely colors of a stained-glass window in St. Stephen's Church. There was sunlight in the green and blue and crimson diamonds that went in a pattern round the border; and when she stepped, she chose to walk on only crimson panes.

Around the walls and way up to the dusky ceiling were long lines of books; and on each side there was a little stepladder to reach the ones that were too high.

But the books weren't like the ones she found in her father's study. His were mostly big and clumsy with dark olive green and black cloth bindings. And even if they didn't have a thing to do with Botany, their backs were shabby.

These were as neat as wax and they ran along in the same color as though they had been dressed in uniform until they changed to a new color. Mostly they were a yellowy soft brown, but even when they were some other shade, their backs were gleaming with small lines and scrolls and curlicues of gold.

It wouldn't do for her to touch, but it couldn't hurt for her to stare at them. And if she started right at the beginning the way her father said she ought to tackle anything worth tackling, she could go all the way along the bottom shelf.

She was crouched low and peering hard when a voice startled her.

"Who told you to come in?" it grumbled.

"Nobody did," she said as she got up. "They only told me that I had to find a buttery."

"Does this look like one?" the voice was asking crossly.

"No, it's got books," she said. "It looks like my father's study only it's much neater and much grander."

"Is that any reason for your feeling you could make yourself at home here?"

"Yes," she said. "I can go into my father's room at any time I like if I don't touch his microscope or handle things. And I wasn't handling, was I?"

"No," the voice said. "You weren't. But you had no business to intrude. I don't have guests."

By now Meg could see a man who was seated down quite low behind a desk and who was wearing a plum-colored velvet jacket. He had no neck at all and he had one shoulder tipped up higher than the other. His chin was resting on his shirt front and he had to try to lift it when he talked. But his face was something like her father's. He had exactly the same kind of nose. His gray eyebrows slanted up in the same way and his eyes were quite as

quick. It was his mouth that was most different, for when he spoke, it winced.

She didn't want to stare. She was trying hard to make believe she wasn't doing it. When she wanted to do most was to get out the door and run away. But it didn't seem polite to leave without a single word to show that she was sorry that he'd fallen down and got his shoulder broken.

"I wish somebody'd come and read to you," she said.

"Read to me." The man's voice grew crosser. "What put that notion in your head?"

"That's what my father always does for me when I get hurt," she answered. "He says it's sure to take my mind up. He says it always helps."

Then, since he didn't say a single word, she had to go on talking.

"When I fell down and broke my arm, my father took me home and put me on the bed and then he read me all about Paul Dombey. He read and read until my mother got back home from Boston and sent him off to get the doctor for me. When the doctor set my arm, it was all swollen and I cried."

"And reading's still the remedy you recommend for broken bones?" he asked. Then when she nodded, he went on. "At any rate, it sounds exactly like the only remedy your father'd try in any crisis found in Christendom. You must be Whitman Bailey's child."

"Yes," she said, "I'm Meg." She paused, and then she said, "I don't believe my father's ever told me anything about you. I don't believe he ever told me who you were."

"No," the man laughed. "He wouldn't. Whitman Bailey, the distinguished scientist, couldn't bear to have his little daughter face an ugly fact in nature. He didn't think you'd have to see me. He knew that if you took one look, you'd run away."

With that, he got up slowly from his chair and stood as high as he could stand. He meant to let her see how very badly he'd been crumpled up and broken. All the while he kept his eyes on her. When he sat down again, she said,

"I didn't run away, I stayed."

"You did," he said. "That was an acid test for both of us. Well,

now suppose we have a fair exchange and you come near and let me try to feel just where *your* arm was broken. There. I've found the very place. That was a smash-up, wasn't it? But that's the kind of thing that happens to young ladies who go prowling round in other people's quarters. Would you mind telling me what you were up to here in mine?"

Now that she was near, she didn't mind the way the man had to lift his chin to talk and she sat down on a crocheted stool beside his chair.

"I was only looking at the books," she said. "At home, we haven't any books with trimmings."

She laughed because he laughed, and then he said,

"Trimmings. That's an odd name to give to my life work, now isn't it? Almost was I persuaded that it had some value and along you come and call it trimmings! How do you think that makes me feel about the hours of labor that I've spent on this one volume?"

He let her feel the ridges he'd been putting in its back and he showed her a gold pattern on the cover. Then he let her roll a little wheel that he kept calling a "roulette" until she asked,

"Did you put all the curlicues on every single book that's in this room?"

"No," he shook his head. "I only do it for my favorites."

"I only own three books," she said.

But when she told him all the reasons why her mother wouldn't let her learn to read, the man said that three books were quite enough and that it meant that each one of them could have a special cover.

"No," she said. "I don't believe I want one for my *Little Rollo*. I don't believe I want a very special one for *Crusoe*. But I do wish I had gold on my *Gulliver*."

"You do?" He seemed to think her choice was funny. "How that would make the old Dean rage and snort."

But then he told her that he hadn't meant to hurt her feelings; that a very angry, fierce old man had never meant to write for children who were her age—just for grown-up children; and that pygmies were intended to be funny in a way she couldn't understand.

"Happily," he said, "it's way above your head. You're far too young to comprehend it. You don't know what it is to hate."

"I do," she said. "I do know how to hate."

"You do?" He didn't act as though he thought that she was speaking truthfully.

"Yes," she said. "I hate my Cousin Anna Simmons. She gave a great big fancy ball and she never asked my mother to her party."

"I expect," he said, "that she didn't like the thought of Cinderella walking off with all her partners. You mustn't blame your Cousin Anna for not asking Beauty to her ball."

"I do," she interrupted. "But the one I really hate is Dr. Vaughan." Then she told all about the time when she'd been rude to Dr. Vaughan about the oak tree. While the man listened, his hand upon her head felt curved and firm and held in the same way she shaped hers over a horse chestnut.

"Listen," he said, when she stopped for breath. "Suppose we keep that story to ourselves and never let another person know about it? Not that it's important, but it seems a shame for a fine oak to get mixed up with hate. I tell you what we'll do so that we'll both forget about it. Right behind me on the shelf that's even with your shoulder, there's a little volume. It's bound in green levant, which is the very finest leather. There. Just where you're looking at the very end. Now take it out and bring it here."

"See," he pointed out when she had laid it on the desk in front of him. "This is Swift's book. It's *Gulliver*. I put that gold design there on its cover because an oak is Swift's own special tree. When he looked at an oak, he thought about its strength. He thought about how high it soared before it started to show age by breaking at the very top. You need only think about its soaring. Would you, if you had this book to own?"

"My *Gulliver*?" she breathed.

"Yes," she heard him promise her. "Your *Gulliver* in gold with trimmings." He took a pen and on the first page of her book, he drew three letters that had flourishes. "That says 'To Meg,'" he told her. Then in a little while, he added, "This says 'From her Cousin Will.' Now then, if you think that you can

manage it, it's yours to take back home. It's time we shook hands and said good-bye."

What she wanted was to go right up and show her present to her father, but when she got back to the terrace, he was still talking to the white-haired lady. He only smiled at Meg to ask if she was having a good time; and when she smiled back, he motioned to her to sit by him and keep very still. She didn't mind. Most of all she wished to look inside her book and find her favorite pictures. She had reached the picture of the old man jumping rope when she felt her father nudge her. Then she heard Great-uncle William calling from his basket chair.

"Well, young lady," he was saying. "Why aren't you strewing garlands like the fair Ophelia? Weren't there any flowers to suit you in my greenhouse? Or has your father bred you to like only cemetery wreaths?"

The greenhouse! She had forgotten all about it. She hadn't thought of it for hours and hours. She could feel her cheeks burn red with shame.

"You said I was to find a butterfly," she stammered out, "and I got lost while I was looking. I only kept on opening doors. And then I found my Cousin Will, and there was lots for us to talk about. We kept on talking till he gave me *Gulliver*. That's why I did forget about the greenhouse. He gave me *Gulliver* for keeps."

Her Great-uncle William called her to his side, but then he didn't say a word to her. He took her book and opened it and he sat staring down at the first page.

"It says 'To Meg,'" she said, because he couldn't seem to read the writing.

"So there was lots to talk about," he said in a low voice.

When he spoke again, he spoke to her father, who had crossed the terrace and was standing near her.

"It's all right, Whittie," he began. "It's hers all right. Will's broken up his set of Swift to give it to her. He's given her his copy. That's exactly what he's done. And you heard her say they'd found a lot of talk about. God! Can he never find a word of grace to say to his own father? He won't lay eyes on me. He hasn't said a word to me for weeks."

He gave Meg back her book, and then there was an awful kind of silence. Not the lady or the two gentlemen seemed to know just what to say. When everybody said good-bye and Meg shook hands with Great-uncle William, she tried hard to think of something that would please him.

"I only saw my Cousin Will," she said. "I never saw the gatehouse or black Nancy or the century plant. It wasn't only the greenhouse I forgot about."

"You saw your Cousin Will," he said. "You talked to him. That's what I want you to remember. That's why there won't be any flowers to cart back home with you. I want you to go home with just your book."

All the way home, Meg's father told her about Cousin Will and how they had grown up together out at Hillwood. Her father had been a lonely little cuss, he said, when his own father'd died and Uncle William had become his guardian. He'd been a lonely little cuss who'd looked like Oliver Twist or Pip or David Copperfield; the three little boys about whom he knew the most exciting stories. Only that he'd never picked a pocket or met a convict in a graveyard or had a dreadful stepfather. He'd just looked like them and felt like them because anybody would who had been left an orphan with no parents. But when she asked him why he didn't have a family he told her that Great-uncle William had meant to take the place of one only that he hadn't had much knack. He'd been used to boys who stood right up to him and shouted back. That's what his did, Meg's father said. They'd made the most infernal racket—except for Cousin Will. It had been Cousin Will who had liked to steal away and read and talk.

"Was he all crooked then?" she asked.

"No," her father said. "He limped. One shoulder was a little tilted. Not much more than that until he started to grow up. But he thinks his parents should have noticed."

"Why didn't they?" Meg urged.

"They did," her father said, "but there wasn't anything on earth that they could do. But it was hard for Will to feel that they didn't even try and only kept on building gatehouses and greenhouses and giving lawn parties. Even if they'd tried and failed, he wouldn't feel so bitter."

"What's bitter, Daddy?" she demanded.

"Hurt way deep inside," her father said. "So hurt that you want to hurt right back again. That's the worst thing that can happen to a person."

"Will it ever happen to me, Daddy?"

"No, Chickie, no," he said. "You mustn't let it. If you ever find it happening, you must try to understand what made the other person act the way he did."

CHAPTER VI

Together they were sitting on the Maxceys' porch and Gid was furious because Meg hadn't seen the gatehouse when she'd gone to Hillwood.

"I told you that it was my favorite place," he said as he reached down and picked a piece of spiderwort that had a clump of silvery seed pods. "I do think," he added as he used a fingernail to slit one open, "that you might have stopped and looked at it."

"My father told me that there wasn't time," Meg was trying to explain. "But I did see the goldfish pond and the brown beeches."

"They're copper beeches and everybody has to have them if they're gentlemen," said Gid. "It was the gatehouse that I wanted you to see."

"When I go again," Meg promised him, "I'll stop there first before I even try to find the greenhouse."

"Find the greenhouse? Didn't you go there either?" He was even crosser. "Then whatever did you do?"

He wasn't interested at all in hearing how her Great-uncle William had kept shouting at her. He said that old men always shouted. And he didn't want to hear about the library.

"But that's all I saw," Meg said, "except my Cousin Will."

She had just begun to tell Gid all about her *Gulliver* and how she mustn't use it just for common when he interrupted her.

"Your Cousin Will's the one who has a hump," he said. "I didn't think you'd ever see him. My mother says he won't see

anyone. She says he goes on binding books or else he'd land in the Asylum. I've got a cousin out there, but it doesn't show. What's your cousin look like?"

Meg thought a moment. Then, "He has nice hands," she said. "Hands?" said Gid.

"Yes," she nodded. She was remembering how firm one of them had felt while she'd stood under it. "My father says hands shouldn't fiddle."

Gid was scowling. "That isn't what I asked you. It isn't what I want to know."

Meg stretched her legs out straight and turned her shoe toes in until they made a V. Then she stared down at the eye-holes that were little rings of dust. She was starting in to run one finger round them, when Gid sprang to his feet and stood before her.

"I've thought up a good game to play," he said. "It's Botany. I'm going to tell you every plant that's growing on this bank. You're just to stop me when I'm wrong."

At first the game was easy. She did know dodder with brown seeds that looked like coffee grounds and chickory for canary birds and plantain that her father said was a confounded pest. But Gid was bringing her a plant that was pale shady-green and juicy and that had a lot of little lemon-yellow flowers. She didn't know its name.

"I do." Gid was speaking very proudly. "I stopped your father on the street and asked him. It's the lesser Celandine. Don't you ever pay attention to him? You ought at least to know the plants here in the Maxceys' yard."

"I do know mostly everyone," Meg said. "Stars-of-Bethlehem and spiderwort and Johnny-jump-up."

"That isn't Botany," Gid broke in. "It's just calling fancy names, not real ones. Besides, these aren't the kinds of plants to like."

"I like them best of all." As Meg spoke, she reached down and broke off a spice pink that was blooming from a tuft of leaves. While she held it to her nose, she said, "I like this best of any."

"No," Gid snatched it from her hand. "You mustn't. There are lots of plants you've got to have like fuchias. You've got to have them just for show. But you can have them out on the front

lawn and not pay any attention to them. That's what I'm going to do when I grow up and have a place. The things I like, I'll grow way out behind the stable. You'll be the only one allowed to see."

"I don't believe," Meg said, "that I want to see a garden out behind the stable."

"All right," he answered quickly. "You won't get another chance to see it. I'm sorry that I told you."

In a moment he was squatting on the bank and pulling out long spears of grass around the stem of a big burdock and he was behaving as though she wasn't on the steps. Meg watched him with his face turned sidewise. His skin was very brown, but even against it, his lashes looked jet black. So did his hair, which was glossy in the sunlight, and the straightness of his nose was like an edge that was a little blunter where his lips shut tight.

"I'm going home," Meg called at last. "Tonight my mother's giving a big party and I'm going to help her."

Gid spread one hand out on the grass and rubbed off all the dirt from his strong fingers. Then he glanced at her.

"That's only an excuse," he said. "If your mother was really giving a big party, I would have seen the men drive up with the ice-cream tubs and there'd be the men who bring the potted palms and the gilt chairs."

"No," Meg said, "there wouldn't be. We've got two potted palms in our front parlor and a lot of chairs and Mother sees to everything."

"Anyhow," Gid said, "if she was really giving a big party, I'd be sure to know because my mother would be coming to it."

"No," Meg said, "she wouldn't. It's not a party meant for ladies. It's a smoker. Only Brown professors can get asked to it. It only is for men."

Gid was staring at her very hard from under his straight eyebrows. Once or twice he started to say something. Then he changed his mind and when he spoke, he said,

"My father asked me if you were a beauty like your mother."

"Did you tell him that I should have been the boy?"

"No," Gid shook his head. "I didn't tell him anything."

Meg sat very still. Then she felt the words rush out in spite

of her. "I wish I was the one who had light hair. I wish I was the one who looked like her."

"No," Gid said. "You're Meg."

After he'd said that, he jumped right up and started home. She watched him shin the fence and then she crossed the street and let herself in her front door.

The house looked different as it always did before a party. In the front parlor, there were lots of flowers; not the light scattery kind her father brought in from his walks and that left a drift of petals on the table. These were the neat, big, separate kind that came in boxes. There were pink roses, each a pointed uncurled bud; and there were carnations; some almost velvet black and some light lemon yellow with bright scarlet edges. Meg was fingering a bloom when she heard her father talking in the dining room. He was sitting in a high-backed chair against the wall and she could see him through the double door.

"I won't have my little Duke of Clarence drowned in a butt of Malmsey," he was saying.

"Who's drowning her?" Meg heard her mother ask. On the table was a snow-white table cloth and at one end of it, there was a great big punch bowl with a silver ladle. "Who on earth," her mother asked again, "is drowning her?"

"You are." The words were spoken firmly. "You are metaphorically. If the end's the same, it doesn't matter if the method's different. I won't have her smothered by top hats and overcoats."

Then Meg knew that they were talking about her and she kept very still.

"She won't be smothered." While her mother spoke, she was arranging small glass cups so that they gleamed around the punch bowl. "I fix it so she shan't be. How could she be when she moves way over in the bed and goes to sleep right up against the wall? Besides, before the party starts, I fix one of your overcoats to look as though she wasn't there. It makes a kind of cave . . ."

"A kind of cave?" From the way he spoke, Meg knew her father didn't like the plan. "Suppose your kind of cave collapses on her?"

"It never does." Her mother was turning to the sideboard for

more cups. "It never has. I don't see why you get so worried over her."

"Don't you?" her father said. "I do."

Meg knew what that meant. Later she was going to wake up in pale gaslight and feel him lifting off one layer of weight and then another till he cleared a big white patch of bedspread. "Even the mighty whale comes up for air," he'd say. "Even the leviathan and great behemoth. I wish your mother had to deal with them when she starts in to give a shindig. At least there'd be some spouting and some trumpeting." Then he'd part his long black coattails and sit down beside the bed and bring out a napkin that was bulging. "We've got our bed, now for our board," he'd say as he picked up a tall hat like the Doremouse's in *Alice*. Right on its glossy crown, he'd make a circle of little cakes edged round with silver beads and pass them over all the folds and ridges of the coats.

She was thinking about that when her mother's voice broke through her thoughts.

"Your room? Don't be silly, Whit. How could I possibly use your room? Men won't traipse up two long flights of stairs to take their things off."

"I traipse," Meg's father said. "Even Pilgrim, for the good of his immortal soul, never traipsed as much as I do to no purpose. But if that's too much to ask of younger legs than mine, why don't you use the boy's room?"

"Little Whit's?" Her mother laughed. "If I sent the men to little Whit's room, you know exactly what would happen. He'd wake up and start in playing games with the top hats."

Meg knew what he was thinking when she saw her father give a long slow smile. But then his voice grew serious.

"It isn't just the matter of the cave," he said. "Meg's up there all alone and I don't like Babes in Woods or Innocence left unprotected. I've never liked them. They've always made me damned uncomfortable. I know that Guardian Angels do appear, but only in the nick of time. Meanwhile there's an awful lot of prowling."

"Prowling?" Mother was now using a piece of yellow chamois on a silver spoon and as she spoke, she rubbed the handle all the

harder. "Our friends don't prowl," she said. "Can you imagine Captain Bixbey's prowling?"

"No," Father said. "Bixbey's a strutter, not a prowler. He's always on a dress parade of some sort."

As he spoke, Meg thought of Bixbey in his artillery uniform that had a scarlet stripe down one long leg. She liked that stripe and the way he drove up in a shiny cab and brought a bunch of great big very purple violets that were wrapped in green wax paper.

They were a present for her mother, who had stopped her polishing and was looking at her father. She had dipped her head down and was smiling upwards. "You wouldn't call our little Seth a master prowler?" she was asking.

"No, God forbid. Little Seth's our wee Scotch mousie. What's more it's you who put the panic in his breastie." Meg watched her father as he spoke. "You know you scare the daylights out of him."

Then she saw her mother holding up a silver spoon as though she liked to see her own reflection in it. "Seth's a great profound philosopher," her mother said. "If he's such a great philosopher, he ought to stand a little teasing."

"Teasing?" Meg's father said. "You call it teasing?"

"Yes," her mother said; "it doesn't hurt him."

"No," Father said, "in your sense it doesn't hurt him. But you haven't much to do with Logic, have you? Or with Ethics? Or with any subject little Seth's supposed to know about." He reached over and put down the spoon and took Meg's mother's hand in his. "You belong," he said, "more properly in my department. No matter what you think, you do belong there. It's the botanist who does go foraging for beauty."

"Foraging! Was that the way that I got found? I didn't know it." Then as Mother took her hand away, she added, "Would you say Dodge prowled? You've always said he was a stickler."

Meg saw that her father didn't mean to answer and she listened to her mother, who was going on.

"I suppose we shouldn't even skip our closest friends. There's Manly and there's Delabarre."

They were the ones Meg thought of as the ones who liked to bring her presents. There was the pen-wiper that was a bright red witch with lots of scalloped skirts and the little silver pencil with

the lead that disappeared and the turquoise ring she mustn't wear because it had a pale blue stone that wouldn't wash. When her father spoke, he didn't mention either Delabarre or Manly.

"I'm only saying," he began, "that among a dozen men, it stands to reason that there is one prowler. Even if there weren't, I don't want Meg lying up there all alone while they go cruising round the room to take their togs off. I won't have it either."

Before Meg heard her mother speak, she saw her rise, clattering the loose silver spoons that were lying near her on the table.

"May I inquire," she asked, "what you intend to do with her?"

"Yes," Meg's father said, "you may. Your mother has her uses. She has even moments when she does agree with me and this happens to be one of them. I'm going to bundle Meg straight off to Mrs. Simmons. Your mother'll stow her somewhere."

"Mother can't stow Meg anywhere. She hasn't anywhere to stow her." Meg was thinking of Grandma's little trundle bed when more words came to her ears that terrified her. "Grandma Simmons isn't even living on Benevolent Street. She's in New York by this time. My brother's going to make a home for her and Grandpa. He moved them on last week."

"Why was I not told?" Meg listened to her father ask the very question that she'd like to ask herself.

"Because," her mother answered, "my mother didn't want to have you know. She knew you couldn't keep it to yourself and that your joy would be too much for you. And there was one thing that she couldn't bring herself to do. She had to steal away because she simply couldn't bear to say good-bye to Meg."

She had barely finished before Meg had plunged across the room and was tugging at her mother's skirts.

"I want my Grandma Simmons," she cried out. "She won't let people prowl. She doesn't let things happen to me."

"She's about the only one who doesn't," Meg caught the words distinctly before her father picked her up and carried her up two long flights of stairs.

She knew that for a long, long while he'd sat beside her and that he'd dabbed her face with a big handkerchief that he kept wetting from a cut glass bottle with a stopper. The handkerchief felt soft as he pushed back her bang with it and it smelled cool

and clean. But the room was dark except for what was on a table near her where a short, stubby candle made a pool of yellow light.

"Where am I, Daddy?" she asked finally.

"You're in my bed," he said. "Tonight I'm going to keep you here."

"Will anybody prowl while I'm asleep?"

"No, Chickie, no. I'm right beside you."

"But you'll be going downstairs to the party."

"No." He laced his hand in hers. "I rather think I won't."

"Mother'll be awfully cross," Meg ventured.

"Your mother's never really very cross," he said. "You'll see tomorrow. There won't be anything that she won't do to make you happy. That's why before you go to sleep, you'd better think of what you want the most."

"Most of all," Meg begged, "I want my Grandma Simmons."

When he did speak his voice was very quiet as it was when he'd had to think up what to say.

"You love your Grandma, don't you?" he began. "You've always known precisely where to find her. She's not much like your parents. She's always just the same. That's one reason why you're going to miss her badly. I shall myself, though slightly differently. But I tell you what we'll do. We'll plan to go and find her, shall we? Not tomorrow, but right after Brown Commencement, you and I will sally forth. We'll sally forth by train and first of all we'll plan to spend enough to go in luxury. We'll each sit on a green plush tuffet in a parlor car and order dinner from a gilded menu and have pink tutti-frutti for dessert."

"Where's my Grandma going to be?" Meg interrupted.

"Your Grandma I was going to make the grand finale of our journey."

"But I want to hear about her now. I want to know just where I'm going to find her."

"Waiting at the door for you," Father said. "And it won't matter if it's the grand main entrance of the Netherlands Hotel or a door that's down an area way. She'll be there waiting for you. I know her well enough for that."

For the first time in her life, Meg knew that Grandmother was

small and had a neat round head that bobbed while she was talking; and that she had gray angry eyes and a way of glancing from the corners of them. She spoke and then she clamped her mouth and looked to see how people liked what she'd been saying. But no matter what, she was glad when a little girl and not a strapping boy was left with her.

"She'll let us stay with her," Meg said.

"Of course she will." Her father knew that too. "She'll not only take you in, but she'll start in cutting capers with you. In all New York, there won't be anything that she won't trot you round to see. She'll run your legs off sight-seeing till I come back to pick you up again. In the meantime, I'll go jaunting up the Hudson River to pay my due respects to Crow's Nest and West Point."

"That's the mountain that has thunderstorms," Meg said. "But if it isn't in New York, I don't want to have you go away to see it."

"You'll be so busy with your Grandma that you won't even know that I'm not there. And on this trip, your Daddy's going to start out with a hankering too. He gets hungry for West Point. That's where he lived before your great-uncle William turned into his guardian and brought him on to Hillwood. He wants to get back home as much as you can want to see your Grandma. Some day he'll show you why."

"When I'm big?" Meg felt it was polite to say.

"When you're big. Good Lordy, no," her father answered. "By then you will have learned to mince along Flirtation Walk and simper over bell-buttons. I'm going to get you there before you've lost your stride. There's climbing to be done up Crow's Nest and flumes and cataracts to cross. If you're to see them at their best, you must see them single-hearted. You can't be thinking of cadets. The one concern that is admissible is a slight concern for the big rattlers."

"Rattlers?" Meg broke in. She had to know about them.

"Yes," he said. "Snakes by common parlance. But not the ordinary harmless kind. We have to give them a wide berth."

"Not like my little snake that lived upstairs in the glass case?" Meg asked.

"Your snake?" He paused. "I didn't think you ever saw him."

"No," Meg breathed. "I never did."

She could feel her father waiting for her to go on. Then he moved over to the bed and put one arm around her.

"I don't suppose," he asked, "that you'd care to tell your Daddy why you didn't come up to your room again?"

No matter what she tried to say, she reached the place where she had overheard her mother talking in the hall and when her mother'd said that she had been cooped up with scarlet fever. She'd been cooped up instead of having fun. To have gone on thinking that she liked to be there . . . And then to learn . . . It was like being bare in front of Bridget. It was too shameful to be spoken of.

"Daddy," Meg started desperately. "I know a boy who's part an Indian. It's Gid. He's got Indian blood. It lets him tell trees in the dark."

Then because her father didn't say a word, Meg told him all about the wild plants growing on the Maxceys' bank and the garden Gid was going to have way out behind the stable. She was stammering on when he closed his hand on hers and stopped her.

"It's all right, my little cherubim," he said. "You can lay down that flaming sword of yours. It's pretty heavy for you to be toting. Your father isn't going to try to storm the gates. Not for worlds would he have you come up to your room again unless you did it happily. He only wants to have you know it's there and waiting. Now we'll return to your young princeling, Gid."

"In a curious way," he said, "Gid gets beneath my skin. Some day he's going to come an awful cropper. He shouldn't be aware of any green thing growing; not even of the castor beans and elephants' ears that I'm sure are waxing fat outside his father's mills. But since he is aware, I'd like to think that he was going to be at Little Compton. Your brother is a shade too old. His uses will come later. But Gid would take you roving with him. He'd have you in and out of the salt swamps and trailing over pastures. You'd have someone to trudge round with."

"He only wants to have me like the things he likes," Meg said. "He doesn't ever want to talk to me the way you talk to me."

She could remember how her father had taken her to look for moonstones and how they'd stopped at tide-pools and seen starfish that each had fat pale fingers and a yellow eye and how they had watched the tide wash in ribbons of brown shiny seaweed and the red, feathery kind that smelled of salt.

"Daddy," she demanded, "why aren't you coming down with us to Little Compton?"

"Because," he said, "I know a lady who is part an Indian."

Then before she had a chance to understand, he drew her very close.

"That wasn't fair," he said. "Your father should be shot and drawn and quartered for using ridicule against you. Why am I not coming down to Little Compton? Because it was the very place where I was happiest. Because I was so happy that I didn't know that other people weren't. Sometimes that rather spoils a place for any future . . ."

"Yes," Meg broke in. "That's why I didn't come back to my room again."

"You didn't think your Daddy didn't like to have you there?"

"No," Meg said. "It wasn't you."

She felt him start and it was quite a while before he spoke.

"Well," he said at last. "You can be sure your room is vacant. I won't rent it furnished or unfurnished. I won't have another tenant except for one big spider and he never told me he was moving in. As a matter of fact, before I knew it, he had spun his web across one window and had reached his cables over to the bookshelves. He rather fancies his suspension bridge and likes to scoot across it."

"Doesn't he ever fall?"

"On purpose mostly," said her father. "He's only taken one big header when I felt I had to boost him up again. But he's forgotten all about his tightropes now that he's found your little shell."

"My little shell?" So it was safe on her own part of the table.

"Yes," her father said. "He's shrouded it and turned it into living quarters. Mostly he stays down in the conch and when I feed him gnats, he dives down in the spiral."

"If he's living in my shell . . ." Meg started.

"Want to have me brush him out?"

"No," she said. "It's all right now I've told you why I didn't come upstairs again. If the spider's living in my little shell, I'd like to come and see."

CHAPTER VII

Meg knew she wasn't ever going to New York, or out to Hillwood, or to Little Compton. Or to Cousin Kate's where her brother Whit was staying. If she had only been a little older and less care, somebody in the Simmons family would have taken her and kept her. But as it was, she'd have to stay at home and run to Bridget for anything she needed. And with Father at death's door, she must stop tagging after Mother and getting in her way and being underfoot.

Being underfoot meant sitting on the stairs and waiting for Mother to go by. It meant hanging round the pantry on the chance that Mother'd have to stand there while she fixed an egg or dusted cinnamon on little yellow custards. It meant lurking on the edge of the front hall when Dr. Vaughan was in the house because Mother had to come downstairs and talk with him before he left.

Across the street, there stood his buggy and his roan horse. As long as Dr. Vaughan was in the house, Meg knew she was to stay outside.

But here on the Maxceys' steps, she was a godsend and a help. And here she didn't bother anybody.

Not even Mr. Lapham, the policeman, told her she was trespassing. Every day he came up the slate walk and went around the house and tried the locks as though she wasn't sitting there. Then after he had stood with one foot on the iron scraper and had asked her all about her father he went off twirling his long polished club on its black leather strap.

In the mornings, too, Califf's market man was apt to draw up in the shade and let her pat his horse that wore a summer bonnet. The iceman went by with his dripping cart and gave her chippings

off an ice block, and Peter Simms, the colored furnaceman, leaned his brown arms on the picket fence and talked.

But at this hour of the afternoon, nobody went by or even came out in the yards that edged the hot, still street. Up on the Browns' lawn, the shadows had begun to slope and no one was working in the narrow rosebed. In one dusky corner, underneath a larch, a hammock spread out like a kite was tilting slowly. It wouldn't be there if the Browns were home, but because they were away for the whole summer, McCusker, the old gardener, dared to lie there in his undershirt. Who was there to tell on him when every house but one on the whole street had all its blinds shut tight?

It didn't do much good, Meg felt, to stare at her own windows. All they showed between the ruffled curtains were the potted palms. Where was Dr. Vaughan? Was the front door never going to open? Then she remembered suddenly. It was the front door that she was to sit and watch.

For Bridget hadn't any sense, so Mother said, about the bill collectors. She asked them to sit down in the front parlor and make themselves at home there. Then she went upstairs and said a friend of Mr. Bailey's was inquiring for him and would wait for Mrs. Bailey. He wasn't any friend, Meg had often heard her mother say. He was a bill collector. And what sense was there in seeing him when it took all the money that there was for medicine and nurses? They took every cent there was, and that collectors couldn't seem to understand.

Anyhow it had been fun to turn it into a game and pretend they didn't hear the bell and never to let Bridget answer it. There'd been the men who'd waited hours on the front steps and who'd finally walked off staring back at the front windows. Especially there'd been the man who had found the way to peer right in. He'd found a clear space in the ground-glass pattern of a pane to the front door and suddenly an eye had been staring in right through a clear round grape. Had she seen it first or had it first seen her with her mother in the hall? At any rate, her mother had made her squat down on the floor with her and for the first time in a long while, she'd laughed.

It was too bad that other people came who weren't collectors.

They were the ones who spoiled things. There was the one that Mother should have seen because he was a Brown Trustee and had come to say that Father needn't worry over college matters. If Mother had only seen him, she could have coaxed him into granting Father his full pay and not just half, which wasn't of the slightest use to anybody. It was right after that that she'd thought up this new game.

Meg was to sit here on the Maxceys' steps and try to guess which were the bill collectors. If she was sure, she mustn't make a move. But if she wasn't sure, she was to signal right across the street to Bridget who'd be standing close behind the potted palms and who was not to go to the front door unless she saw Meg nod three times.

Even when it was all right, Bridget didn't always have to go. There were the people Meg could talk to and save footsteps. They were the ones who made the game such fun.

This afternoon it was too hot for anyone to come, but Meg could think about the ones who'd called and choose whom she would like to have walk down the street. Not Mrs. Crosby, who had black eyes and a big solemn face and who always brought three dark red roses she called "Jacks" and said they were "a wee bit nosegay for Professor Bailey." Not Miss Almer from the Athenaeum whose wrinkles all collected round her mouth and who said, "I've scoured the countryside to bring a breath of something woodsy." When each of them announced that she was Professor Bailey's favorite private pupil, Meg somehow felt ashamed. Besides, she knew what happened to their presents. Her mother had no time, she said, to stick them into water and if people wanted so to help why didn't they bring soup or calf's foot jelly? She could do, she said, with much less adoration and more sense.

But at least Meg hadn't minded fixing their flowers in a common tumbler half so much as she had minded getting out a kitchen spoon and planting the small traveller's fern way out in the back garden. That wasn't what the little farmer man who had driven up with it had wanted. He'd wanted to be sure, he'd said, that Professor Bailey got it because it would remind him of the very spot on which it grew and make him want to get well soon.

Meg had liked the farmer man. She'd liked him more than

anyone except Gid's mother and her Cousin Julia. If she started thinking about them, she'd stop wondering why the doctor had to stay so long.

Gid's mother, Mrs. Codman, had been the most exciting. Meg hadn't thought that anyone like that was going to stop at her house. Mostly ladies didn't who had shiny carriages and spans of horses and coachmen in white breeches and plum-colored coats with silver buttons. If they ever drove down Cushing Street, they went calling on the Browns. But though Meg hadn't budged, this lady had noticed her, had called to her, and had motioned with the whitest glove to a place right on the seat beside her. Then the lady'd told of how she used to go to Hillwood and know Father and walk with him when he went off botanizing in the woods. That was one reason, she'd explained, why she had hoped so much that he would take Gid with him when he went to find plants in Cat's Swamp . . .

"But," Meg had said, "Father's sick in bed. He isn't ever going anywhere."

She could remember saying that because right afterwards, the lady had been so sure that he was getting better. That was what she'd heard from Mother. Mother had written that it was a question now of finding something that would tempt his appetite.

"I only hope," Gid's mother had said, "that the champagne will help." Champagne. Meg still liked to say that cool new word that stood for what the coachman in the tight white breeches and plum-colored coat had carried up the steps in a straw basket. And it had helped, hadn't it? Otherwise Meg knew her mother wouldn't say that if she dared to hint again, she would beg Mrs. Codman to send more of it. But wishing wasn't hinting. Meg could sit right here and wish that Gid's mother'd come again; and not because she'd worn a creamy, lacy dress and a lace hat. There were lots of things she could drive up and leave.

But the one Meg wanted dreadfully to see again was Cousin Julia. She'd know her this time and not think she was a woman from the country who was only peddling eggs. If Cousin Julia came down the street this moment, she'd be sitting in the front of an old carryall and be driving a sleepy-looking old brown horse with a tan-colored mane. She'd have on a black chip hat trimmed

with a bunch of faded purple pansies. It would be pinned by two jet hat pins stuck into her white hair and she'd wear a blue and white seersucker dress and gray cotton gloves that were so loose they didn't fit.

This time, Meg knew she wouldn't rush straight up and tell her that they couldn't buy eggs from her. And she'd know that the old Irishman who held the reins was Patsy and her father's friend and somebody for her to shake hands with. Cousin Julia's voice had made that plain although her eyes had crinkled and she'd smiled.

But best of all, she'd sat right down on the front steps and talked. Not the way that Mrs. Crosby and Miss Almer did, as though Meg didn't know her father well enough to speak to. Cousin Julia had made him seem quite real again instead of someone who was sick way up on the third floor. Then she'd taken out a great big safety pin and had pinned an envelope in the middle of Meg's guimpe.

That was the envelope that Meg had heard her mother say had saved the day for all of them. Her mother had been so excited when she'd found that Cousin Will had sent it to her that she hadn't paid the least attention when Meg had shown the book he'd sent to her.

But before Cousin Julia'd left, she'd opened it and explained it. "Auton House" was a real house standing right in Providence and the children in the pictures were real children. Cousin Will had known them and he'd wanted Meg to have the book about them because he'd thought they would be company and were about her age.

The best part was that every room in "Auton House" was full of them. And they didn't act like "Little Rollo." They were leaning out of windows and having pillow fights in all the bedrooms and sliding down the banisters and pulling candy in the kitchen. It was the kitchen that they liked the best of all.

That was why Meg had shown the book to Bridget and had said how much she wished that she had somebody to play with.

But she wasn't ever going to have if her mother could prevent it. That was just the reason why Meg slept beside her mother. It was, so Bridget said, to keep her father out. If a child was there,

he couldn't come without its being shameful. And he mustn't come because then more children happened and children cost too much to have.

The worst part was that there wasn't anything that Meg felt that she could do about her costing. There was really nothing she could do except not get underfoot.

And suddenly she felt she'd reached the end of helping that way. Somebody ought to know that she was tired of sitting all alone. Somebody ought to want her round and talk to her. Before she knew it, she had crossed the street and taken out the key that was hung around her neck inside her dress and turned the lock. The hall was dim and close and cool. There wasn't anybody there. But Dr. Vaughan was still in the front parlor. She could hear him saying.

"Now that Whitman's better, you don't have to go on moping by his bedside. You could come out for a drive. We'd make an afternoon of it."

Whitman. That meant Father. And the doctor wouldn't say that he was better if it wasn't so. Only once that he'd said that, why didn't he get up and leave? It was awful to be sitting out here on the stairs, when what Meg truly wanted was to rush in to Mother and find out when Father could see someone even if he was in bed.

Meg had been thinking of the first thing that she meant to tell him when she still heard Dr. Vaughan.

"A man has only so much patience," he was saying.

Her mother's voice was interrupting. "I thought that everybody understood," she said. "I thought they understood about myself and Whitman. I can't help it if I'm young and sometimes want young fun. But that's what Whitman's wanted me to have. He knows there isn't any harm in it."

"So there isn't any harm." Dr. Vaughan was sounding cross. "It's all just a harmless little bit of fun for everybody, isn't it? You can make a fine fool of a man and feel you'll never have to pay for it. I don't suppose you've ever owed a debt you thought you had to meet."

It was the way he spoke that made Meg very angry. She was heading for the parlor when she heard her mother speaking in the queerest voice.

"I owe you one great debt. You've pulled Whitman through his sickness. It's a debt I mustn't let myself forget."

"Suppose then that you start to pay it," Dr. Vaughan was saying.

"I will, the moment that you send your bill in."

"What happens to your bills is pretty common knowledge."

Meg felt her bang grow hot. So then the doctor knew about the way she sat and watched for the collectors. There was something horrid in his voice that stopped its being just a funny game.

"I can tell you one thing," Meg heard her mother's voice at last. "You'll never have the right to speak to me that way again; not you or anybody else. You wait and see. In the meantime you're to leave my husband's house. You're never to come back again."

In a second, Meg had almost bumped straight into Dr. Vaughan. She stopped just long enough to see him pick his hat up from the chair and to know that there were white wrinkles in his long pink face.

"I heard," Meg said as she went up to her mother. "I heard every word. I couldn't help it."

As she looked she knew that if Mother ever cried, she would be crying. Her face had turned so pale that it made her have dark eyebrows and her eyes seemed deep and almost black.

"We can lock the door," Meg cried, "and we can hide when the collector comes."

"No," her mother said. "We can't. That's exactly what we can't do. We're not ever going to get another thing unless we pay right up."

"I don't see what we're ever going to do." Meg was repeating words she heard when there wasn't any money. But when she spoke, she saw her mother straighten up.

"I know exactly what we're going to do," her mother said. "I know exactly. There's the check from Cousin Will; the one he sent by Cousin Julia. I never meant to take a cent from any of the Baileys. But it's going to settle Roland Vaughan for good. Even if he doesn't send a bill, I'm going to pay him. And that isn't all by half."

Meg was trying hard to make things out when her mother's voice went on.

"I've got to use Will Bailey's check to start me off, but once

I'm clear of debt, I'm never going to take a cent that I don't earn."

"Earn?" Meg asked because she didn't understand.

"Yes, earn," her mother said. "By scrubbing if I have to. I could hire out as a cook. I could hire out as a kitchen maid."

The worst part was that anything her mother boasted that she'd do, she always did. Not even Grandma Simmons tried to stop her. It was only wasting breath, Meg had often heard her father say. It was like talking to the wind. All the same this was so dreadful that she had to try.

"I don't want to have you go to work downstairs in anybody's kitchen. I don't want to have you look like Bridget."

"Don't you, Precious?" This time her mother was really smiling at her. "Why, Bridget is a fine upstanding woman with some moral sense to her. Your mother couldn't look like her. She's got the very quality I've just been told I lacked." As she stopped speaking, she got up from her chair and went over to the long, gilt mirror that reflected the whole parlor. As she bent to gaze in it, she lighted up its shadowy dimness.

"If I've got no moral sense, I've got something else as good," she said as she stared at her own image.

"What have you got?" Meg asked as she went over and stood very close.

"Gumption," her mother said. "I got it from your Grandma Simmons. And I'm going to need it. But once I've made my mind up, I can do anything I like."

"You mean go out to work?" That was the thing that scared Meg.

"No," her mother said. "First I'm going to try my hand at something I just thought of. I looked at you and then I thought of it. Your Cousin Will, who took a fancy to you, says it's time you learned to read. He wrote me that I ought to take the time to teach you. Well then, I'll round up all the children in the neighborhood and go to work in my own house. I'll have a school right here in my front parlor."

"Right where I am?" Meg gasped.

"Right where you are. It's the very place to have a kindergarten." Mother was glancing round the room. "The piano can

stay where it is," she said. "Somehow I'll learn to play a morning hymn on it. Then I'll say the whole Lord's Prayer. Then I'll start inspecting desks."

"There aren't any desks," Meg interrupted.

"No," her mother said. "Of course there aren't, but that doesn't mean there won't be. There'll be three aisles of shiny desks and blackboards on the walls and a big map pinned on the folding doors. I want to pitch in now. But I rather think I'll wait and let you tell your father that you'd like to have a school here. The very moment that I think I've hit on the best thing for you, he gets the queerest notions that I'm doing something wrong."

CHAPTER VIII

For the past week, Meg had come upstairs to see her father in his room and yet he still looked strange to her. She wasn't used to seeing him in bed or to meeting his gray eyes without their spectacles; and while before he'd only had a close moustache, now he had a beard. It was so much whiter than his hair that he seemed an old, old man until he smiled.

He had been smiling while Meg had been telling him about the school that her mother meant to have. But now that she had told him what she was supposed to say and had gone back to her chair, he was laughing at her mother.

"You run a school?" he said. "I didn't know you'd ever been to one."

"Of course I haven't," Mother said. "How could I out in Simonsville with just the District one to go to? There wasn't any sense in learning wrong. When I found that out, I stopped."

"Then," Father said, "you knew enough to know that bad teaching can be harmful."

"But mine isn't going to be bad teaching." As Mother spoke, a bright piece of hair broke loose and shone against her cheek. "Mine's going to be good teaching. I don't see why you think it won't be."

Why wouldn't he say it would, when that was what she wanted?

From where Meg sat in the shadow of the big brown bureau, she couldn't see her mother's face, but she knew the answer that would make her mother lift her head up and stop making puckers in the thin stuff of her yellow dress.

"What makes you think mine's going to be bad teaching?" As Mother spoke, she leaned her head with its bright shining braids of hair against the worn, brown, dingy velvet cover of her chair. "You might as well be frank," she said.

Meg saw her father wasn't laughing now. His eyes were sober.

"Darling," he began, "even you can't just decide to run a kindergarten without any sort of preparation. You've got to study first and know a little about Froebel."

"I do know about him," Mother said. "I know a lot about him. He's the very one they recommended at the Athenaeum and I've read two whole thick books about him this past week."

Then when Father didn't say a word, her voice went racing on.

"It's not that I agree with him in everything. Not at least about those twittery bird games he's so fond of. I couldn't ask a self-respecting child to play them; and I don't believe that I could manage Tick-Tock and get children to pretend that they were pendulums to clocks. But in lots of other ways Froebel's going to come in handy."

"'Come in handy.' " Meg watched her father sitting bolt upright with two rumpled pillows left behind him. By the way he spoke, she knew that he'd forgotten she was in the room. He was almost shouting. "Froebel come in handy. Lord!"

"Well, he will." Mother wasn't going to take it back. "Of course he will. He believes in nature study, doesn't he? And heaven knows, nobody'd have to go outside this house to study nature. We always have a leech that's crawled out of a jar or a caterpillar spinning on a chair or a turtle having a vacation in the bathtub. And Froebel thinks that children ought to know about them just as he thinks they ought to know about the birds."

"Know about the birds?" Father laughed. "But, Darling, you don't know an owlet from a tufted puffin."

"Because there isn't any tufted puffin," Mother answered. "That's the silly kind of name that you make up when you get cross with me. Anyhow since Froebel does believe that children

ought to study birds, there are all the stuffed ones on the shelves in your herbarium."

Meg had been wondering if she ought to say that she was in the room, but if they were only talking about birds it couldn't matter. She thought about the oriole that would be truly orange and the tanager that would be truly scarlet if they weren't so dusty. Only the barred owl was perfect. He was the one she went to first to find him sitting on a perch outside a hole in a real piece of tree and staring at her with round, glass yellow eyes.

"What's that about the warblers?" she heard her father ask.

"Only that it's nice that they're all labelled. I can teach from them until I know enough to take my pupils out on field trips." Mother spoke as though she'd planned exactly what she meant to do. "And," she added, "I can do the same thing with your rocks."

"Minerals. Not rocks." The words came thundering.

Meg's finger stopped tracing the little blue gray veins that ran along the marble slab in the big bureau. She knew exactly how her father felt about his minerals. All around his rooms in Maxcey Hall were high brown cases that had drawers that stuck and joggled. In some, were little chunks that looked like jagged bits of bubbled candy that had hardened: and in others there were lumps that had bright glints when they were tilted toward the sunlight. There was a pale pink watery one that she sometimes was allowed to hold, but never if she asked to see "the rocks."

"You mean you'd like to use my minerals." Meg knew her father was so cross because her mother'd used the baby name for them. "I do believe you think," he said, "that God Almighty'd offer you his walls of jasper to turn into knick-knacks, if you wanted them."

"I thought you were an atheist," Meg heard her mother say. "I thought you were a follower of Darwin. Anyhow it's only you who think things are so sacred."

"They are." Father's voice was getting loud. "If there is a God, He's personal to this extent. He has His own ideas of sanctities. He has a few possessions of His own, He won't have tinkered with."

"Tinkered with? Who's going to tinker with them? Only you."

Meg could feel her mother trying to be patient. "You wouldn't have to bring so many rocks at once. Just a few that you could carry in your pocket. Then when you'd told the children all about them, you could bring some new ones and take the old ones back.

"I tell the children? I?" Meg did wish he wouldn't speak so loud. "Don't tell me that you mean to drag me into this?"

"But you'll be the drawing-card," her mother pleaded. "There isn't any other school that has a Brown professor teaching in it. Ours is the only one where they'll get science from a scientist."

"Listen, Eliza." When her father called her mother that, Meg knew it was too late for her to steal out of the room. She hardly dared to breathe. "Let's hear no more," her father said, "about this nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense, Whitman." Meg saw her mother's chin go up. "You're always teaching everyone in town. The doorbell's always ringing and somebody's brought a plant for you to name. You don't care who it is. You ask them in and sit right down with them and start instructing.

"I don't start instructing." Meg had never heard him speak in quite this voice. "Instructing is exactly what I don't do. I name a plant and give out a few simple facts. That's not the way I teach in my own classroom. There isn't any system to it. There isn't any progress. I'm not being morally responsible for anybody's education."

"How could you be morally responsible," her mother asked, "in telling about rocks to little children? If anything is innocent . . ."

"Thunderation," Father burst out with one word. Then "Can't you understand," he asked, "that I'm not trained to be an educator of the young? Couldn't be. Wouldn't if I could. And there's another thing that you might try to understand. A man's profession comes to be his own integrity. Damn it, he can't play hob with it to please his wife. He can't cheapen it to turn an extra penny."

"Can't he? I could." As Meg listened, she hoped that she could ever sound so proud. "I could use anything I had or was," her mother said, "to help you and the children. At the moment there's nothing that I wouldn't do if it would pay our bills. And you needn't shake your head. I know I'm late in waking up to any

sense of debt. It took that slur of Roland Vaughan's to make me feel ashamed. When he spoke to me the way he did, it made me sick to know he had the right to."

"He won't ever speak to you again," Meg's father said.

"That's not the point." Meg saw her mother shake her head as she continued talking. "The point is that what Vaughan said to me is true. I do have bill collectors on the doorstep. I do have the name of never paying anyone. I'm just the kind of wife your Uncle William Bailey told you that I would be. He didn't want me in his family." Her voice sank lower as she added, "Whitman, I'm so ashamed."

"I'm equally to blame," Meg heard her father say.

"No," her mother said. "You're not. You were the one who thought we ought to wait. I made you think that I could manage somehow. And I haven't even tried. I've been doing what your uncle told you that I would do. I've been plunging into debt and behaving just exactly like my grandfather. Only that I haven't splurged. I haven't quite kept pace with the old Senator." Once that she'd caught her breath, she went on talking. "That's why I've got to go to work. I won't have the children growing up with everybody not quite sure of how to treat them and humiliated when they're not responsible. They shan't be made to feel ashamed. I'd rather go out scrubbing . . ."

"I don't want to have you go out scrubbing," Meg cried out. "I want you to be here."

In a moment she was close against her mother's shoulder. Under her cheek, she felt it warm and round and strong.

When Meg looked up at her father, he was lying back against his pillows and staring clear across the room at a painted picture of some orange leaves that were framed with a gilt edging. As he began to speak, his voice was tired, but it wasn't cross. It was the voice he used for her.

"All right, my little idol of the tribe," he said. "Your father can't stand out against the two of you. Your mother's going to have her school in her own house. I'll fetch the rocks and you shall fetch the birds and every time you go to College with me, we'll come home with ballast. I daresay that you can tote the little owl that you took such a shine to and we'll try to wangle

more than that. In the meantime you can set to work and think of all the things you'd like to have around a schoolroom. There's a task for you. And here's another if we're going to get things started properly. Suppose that I appoint you the head gardener. Think you could manage to extract some lima beans from Bridget? The next thing is to soak them in a bowl before you plant them."

"Lima beans?" Meg's mother asked. "Whatever made you think of them?"

"Because," her father said, "they're simple as a starter. This is a job we've got to tackle properly. Once I'm on my feet we've got to pitch right in and know much more than labels. These days, children are supposed to grow the plants they learn about. Well, then, we'll start a lima bean patch; and as a matter of mere common honesty, you'll grow and learn about them first."

"You'll teach me and I'll know." Meg watched her mother smiling as she spoke. "This time I'll want to pay attention."

"Will you?" Father didn't sound so sure.

When he spoke again, Meg knew that he was choosing words he didn't think a child would understand.

"There's another thing," he started off, "about this venture. Not that I care a continental. It's not the sort of thing that bothers me. If people want to say I don't provide a proper stipend for my household, it's the ugly fact and not the rumor that I mind. But helpmates don't often help financially in our world; not at least by their own labors. One who does is going to find herself in a position rather different. Not excluded from all social life. Not quite that exactly . . ."

"That doesn't scare me. I've often been excluded." As her mother spoke, Meg wondered what there was to make her say, "It doesn't scare me in the least."

At any rate, Meg saw that her father wasn't worried over it. "It's just something," he was saying, "that I thought I ought to mention. And there's one thing else," he added; "the one I'm aptest to forget."

"What?" her mother asked. But she wasn't troubled any longer. She was reaching out and buttoning a pearl button in Meg's dress.

"Money. Hard cash. Capital is, I believe, the name for that which guarantees investment. Won't you have to put some money

into this?" Meg had almost never heard her father speak of "money." But he was being very serious as he added, "There must be things you'll have to buy."

"I've got almost all the things I need. You ought to see the lower hall," her mother answered quickly.

Meg did wish she wouldn't tell him any more about it, but, "The parlor's all cleared out," her mother's voice was hurrying on. "You wouldn't recognize it, Whitman."

Every day Meg went downstairs and didn't recognize it. All the things that she loved best were taken out; the armchair with the pale green velvet back embroidered with bright butterflies; the gilt easel with the sheaf of peacock feathers; the black ebony table where she always found the little ivory elephant. Even the Japanese lady on the scroll was taken down. It was her going that Meg minded most. As far back as she could remember, Meg could remember the Japanese lady's jet-black roll of hair with the fan stuck through it sidewise and the long purple dress that flowed around her feet and the scarlet sash tied in a bow in front.

"The piano's where it's always been," Meg's mother said.

"But the banjo's gone. I don't like to have it gone," Meg added.

"You needn't think that I don't miss it too," her mother said.

But then she went on talking as though there wasn't anything she minded.

"The piano has to stay because I'll have to use it for the kindergarten songs. Wait till you hear me, Whitman, playing 'Birdies in the Greenwood.' "

"And 'Grasshopper Green.' " That was Meg's favorite.

"Yes," Mother said. "The child always chooses that one tune. Little Whit's the one who's truly musical. All the things I have to struggle over, he rattles off by ear. If he were young enough to go to school at home, he could play all the marches for me. But I don't suppose that I could yank him out of Mr. Lyon's could I?"

"No," Father said, "you couldn't. But you were telling me about the disappearance of our pretty parlor. May I ask what fills the devastated scene?"

"Desks. Bright shiny varnished desks. And across the folding

doors is a big map of the United States, and where my portrait used to hang there'll be a blackboard."

"Must we lose the portrait too?" Meg's father interrupted.

"I thought," her mother said, "I thought you thought that Charlie Stetson made a botch of painting me."

"Not a botch," her father contradicted. "I called it a poor substitute, but there have been moments when I have enjoyed its company."

"But you won't have to now," her mother said.

"I'm not sure as yet," Meg saw her father smile. "I'm not sure as yet, which I prefer."

"What you're going to get," her mother said, "is a staid school-marm."

"Which brings me back"—his voice grew serious—"as to how we're going to pay for this new set-up. How in thunder are we?"

"They're paid for, Whit." Her mother was, Meg knew, a little scared. She had begun to stammer. "Will Bailey paid for them."

"Will Bailey?" Meg saw her father was surprised. "Why should he pay for them? I thought we weren't to take a nickel from the Baileys. Ever."

"But Will came to my wedding, didn't he? He came when all the other Baileys didn't. He got himself brought down the aisle and put beside your Cousin Julia. When I turned from the altar, there he was."

Meg was trying hard to imagine the whole picture when she realized that there was more to hear.

"Of course that hasn't anything to do with anything," her mother's voice was saying. "Meg's the reason why he helped me. When he sent me the big check, he wrote me that she ought to go to school. He said her mind was ready for it and that it wasn't fair of me to hold her back. Meg's the reason why he staked me to a kindergarten. Besides, he isn't really giving me the money. Every year I'm going to pay him back so much. He wants me to be business-like."

"But you don't know that you can pay him back. People may not even want to send their children."

Just as Meg saw an awful picture of the shiny desks all standing vacant, she heard her mother sounding glad.

"People do want to send their children, Whit. They like to have a school right in the neighborhood. I've got thirty pupils as a starter."

"As a starter. When is this school going to open?" To Meg's surprise her father didn't seem much interested. He was lying back against his pillows and his hands were empty with the palms turned up.

"It's going to open in two weeks. That's when all the others open. If I could, I would have put it off till you were stronger. But I hope you'll be downstairs by then."

"Do you?" To Meg it didn't sound exactly like a question. "If I never came downstairs," her father said, "you'd sail ahead in the same way. You'd sail even further. You'd sail straight out of port."

"No. No, I couldn't. That's one thing I wouldn't ever do." In a second, there was Mother by his side. And she had forgotten there was anybody in the room as she leaned her head against his shoulder. "No matter what I do, no matter what I say," she said, "be patient with me, Whitman. It's not even little Whit or Meg who matter to me. Only you. That's true even when you think I try to drive you frantic."

As Meg tiptoed from the room, words came drifting after her. "There's no one else who truly matters. There isn't anybody else who truly counts."

CHAPTER IX

This Christmas tree was bigger, but the one last year had been more wonderful. Only the smell of it had breathed out through the cracks of the locked door until Meg had been allowed to march into the front parlor and stare up at the flickering little yellow lights.

This new one she had watched being brought into the house. She had seen it having its green boughs untied and its rough trunk braced up so that it shouldn't topple and she'd help to spread

the white sheets under it so that they looked like folds of snow. The ornaments that had once been high and far away, she'd had to pass while her mother had done the trimming. Meg had handed up the necklaces of gold and silver balls, the coils of furry tinsel, the reindeer with their tiny sleds and even the big shining star that went on top.

"What's the matter, little Slowpoke," her mother had called down from her stepladder.

"I don't like to finger them," Meg had explained.

But her mother had thought that she was scared of dropping things and hadn't understood that they stopped being beautiful when she could handle them.

If Meg couldn't tell her mother that, she felt she couldn't tell how much she hated kneeling down on the white sheets and arranging all the presents that were School presents. What was the use in saying, "I want this to be just our tree?"

What she didn't want was to have children running up and down her steps and sliding down the railing and having any right to troop in her front door as though it wasn't her own house.

And today it was much worse. Her mother had said this was a Christmas party mostly meant for parents. That was why Meg was to be especially polite and not to make embarrassing remarks and to show everybody but the pupils into the back parlor and to tell them where to go.

"And be sure to put clean towels out," her mother had said. "Somebody may want to go up to the bathroom."

"But Pinnie's in the bathroom," Meg had reminded her.

"Suppose he is," her mother'd said. "Nobody's going to hurt him."

"But nobody keeps a guinea pig in the bathroom," Meg had protested. "Nobody does."

"I thought that you were fond of Pinnie." That was all her mother had said as she'd gone downstairs to take a last look at the schoolroom and to see that everything was tidied up.

There was just one thing, Meg felt, for her to do. If anybody asked, she'd tell them that there wasn't any bathroom. She didn't care if that was lying. Very slowly she went down the stairs to meet the ladies who were coming in the door.

"Mrs. Bailey wants to have me show you where to go," Meg told one and then another.

But they weren't going to pay the least attention to her. They kept saying that they had to sit beside a friend or that they didn't want a lot of hats in front of them. Mrs. Scattergood, who had a soft, pink face, was telling everyone that she'd brought Barbara to watch her two big brothers. Mrs. Dunham had only Claude, but she had promised him that he should see her looking at him while he spoke his piece because he meant to grow right up to be a lawyer like his father; and Mrs. Roland said she had to be where she could do a little prompting if Harold got to stammering.

"Mrs. Bailey wants to have me show you where to go," Meg went on saying.

At last one lady spoke to her. "Aren't you Mrs. Bailey's little girl?" she asked.

"I go to Mrs. Bailey's Private School," Meg said.

"Of course you do," a voice she'd heard before was saying. "It's your own school as much as Mother's, isn't it? That's why I'm asking you to find us two good seats."

"Two?" Meg asked because the lady seemed to be alone.

"Yes," the lady said. "Two seats for two old friends of yours who came to watch the Christmas Party. We didn't have to go to our own school today because vacation's started. All our little friends were coming here, so we came too, to watch."

"I didn't want to come," a furious voice was shouting. At first Meg hadn't seen him, but behind the dark brown velvet of his mother's suit was Gid dressed up in his best clothes.

"He's only being rude because he is embarrassed. But of course he wants to come," his mother said.

"I don't," he cried. He had the silly wavery smile he always had when he apologized. "I tried like anything to stay away."

With that, his mother took him off to a far corner. But Meg knew exactly what he meant to tell her. His coming was like spying, sort of. He'd see her mother teaching school and know she didn't have a parlor any longer and had to have lunch baskets standing all the morning on the sideboard and hooks screwed up along the hall for all the hats and coats. He might even learn about the guinea pig. And there was one thing even worse.

He'd learn, Meg knew, that her mother never, never called on her; not to bound the State of Maine or choose a song or read out loud or anything. And it wasn't true what Amey Willson said. She only said it to be nice. If it was really true that a teacher couldn't call on her own child without everybody's thinking she was playing favorites, she could surely do it once. If she couldn't do it once, it meant she didn't trust her child the way she trusted other children. Gid was going to learn, Meg felt, that she was not allowed to speak a piece.

Once she'd sat down at her desk, she kept staring at its varnished cover till Amey Willson nudged her.

"Your mother's rung the bell," she said. "It's time to fold your hands."

"What poem are you going to say?" Meg whispered.

"The lowing herd," said Amey.

That was the poem that Meg envied her the most. When everybody else forgot to learn a brand new poem, Amey could always add on lines to what she knew before. She could go on and on.

All around the room, voices had begun to sing a hymn. "Noel, Noel," they sang until it sounded like a race in which the one who sang the loudest would be sure to get the prize.

Meg watched her mother bowing down her head and saying the Lord's Prayer. Her little tortoise-shell comb, shaped like a fan, was stuck exactly where her part stopped and behind it her light hair was looped up in great braids. But it seemed too bad that she didn't have on her best black dress with the light blue panne velvet trimmings. A white starched shirtwaist didn't make her look so pretty. But when Meg had told her so she'd said that parents didn't send their children to her school to have her looking pretty: that was the last thing that she was supposed to be.

Charlie Farnum, with the roundest, whitest collar, was at the blackboard now, adding up three columns of figures. He loved to jump two numbers at a time, stabbing at them with a pointer and calling out just what there was to carry. Now that he'd reached the end and turned, his face was flaming red because he was so proud.

Meg was glad she didn't have to do a sum or handle the stuffed birds which looked so dusty and so dead. And she didn't want to

take the great big model of an eyeball all apart as Bobby Finch was doing. Ever since her father had brought it home from College, she had hated it because it looked so big and bloodshot. She didn't even mind if she couldn't tell about her seed beds or her scrap-book of pressed leaves. What she wanted was to speak a piece.

And the time had come for everybody else. Meg watched her mother smiling clear across the room at all the ladies in the audience. Now she wore the kind of smile she wore for children.

"I know that some of you," she said, "would like to say your favorite poems. Suppose that you begin by telling why they are your favorites."

"Can I be first?" Paul Pond was on his feet.

As he bowed, his curved brown bang looked very brushed and glossy and his eyes looked very wide apart and round.

"Mine's a patriotic poem. That's the reason why I chose it."

Then with his big mouth curling up around the words, he started.

"Breathes there the man with soul so dead."

His voice was getting louder now that he'd reached the part about "my native land." It was so loud and fierce that Meg could feel a tingle.

"If such there breathes, go mark him well."

Paul was scowling hard at somebody and pointing at them with one finger as though he knew a lot of dreadful things about them. And his cuff was way out of his jet-black sleeve so that he'd never get it back again. He didn't even notice. He was trying hard to reach the end before his breath gave out.

"Unwept," he gasped, **"unhonored and unsung."**

Before the clapping stopped, Mollie Burgess with her black hair flying took his place and raced through her poem so that nobody could tell what she was saying. And no sooner was she in her seat than Ada Corliss pointed out her toes and walked up to the desk and made a curtsey with her little finger held out separate. She had on the challis dress Meg loved because it had a pattern of the tiniest moss roses and her eyes were very moist and brown and sad.

"My poem's a happy poem," Ada began. "It's all about my favorite flowers. 'Heigh-ho, daisies and buttercups.'"

She'd forgotten that she ought to give the title and then pause. Now she'd stopped short and she couldn't get beyond the part about the daffodils even though she'd said the "Heigh-ho" part all over.

"Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall," Meg could hear her mother helping Ada in the kindest voice.

But it wasn't any use. Now that Ada had begun again three times she was bursting into tears.

As Meg watched, she felt there wasn't much to cry for; not when her mother was reaching out her own best handkerchief and saying,

"Never mind. A little later you'll show everyone how nicely you can lead the Grand March for us."

That was the most special favor. It had to do with good deportment and a nice appearance. Though Meg had on her best white piqué dress and hadn't squirmed or fidgeted, she knew exactly what she'd have to do. She'd have to walk around the room with someone whom the other children didn't like so very much. It was not polite for her to choose.

As Meg glanced at her mother, she could tell that she had truly minded about Ada's stopping short before she'd finished. Now her mother was looking round the room to see whom she could pick with safety. Not Harold Roland. She wasn't going to risk his stuttering. Not Phyllis Baker, who always lisped and acted silly. It wasn't time for Amey because "the lowing herd" right at the end, Meg had heard her mother say, made such a good impression.

"This time I'm going to ask for volunteers." Those Meg didn't know about, but her mother was explaining. "That means any little boy or girl who wants to say a favorite poem."

Any little boy or girl! All of a sudden, Meg felt her bang get very hot where it covered up her forehead. "Any" meant her as much as anyone and there were all the lovely poems that Cousin Will had taught her when she went to see him out at Hillwood. He would love to have her show how well she knew them and how he'd taught her to speak out clearly and not mumble. She had got up from her chair and straightened out her skirt in back and was going down the aisle.

But just as she got half way, she knew that her mother was trying hard to make her go back to her seat and that she wasn't going to do it. Each forward step she took felt just like pushing hard with all her strength. She had to shove her way against an order that her mother couldn't say out loud, but that she didn't have to. She was looking as she looked when she gave a firm command. And this that Meg was doing was what was called a willful disobedience when her brother did it. Never before in her whole life, had she been disobedient, but she meant to be so now.

Swiftly she held out her stiff skirts and made a curtsy. Then she searched the audience until she met Gid's eyes. "I'm allowed to speak a piece like everybody else" was what she meant for him to understand. She didn't have to say it wasn't one she'd learned in school, but was one that Cousin Will had taught her. If she didn't mumble once, her mother'd have to end by being proud.

"This is," Meg said, "my favorite poem. It's a poem by William Shakespeare and he was a scientist just like my father. He liked snakes and toads and spiders just the way my father does. That's the reason why I learned this."

There wasn't any sense in everybody's laughing. They'd have to see when she began.

"'You spotted snakes with double tongue!'" She was speaking very slowly and distinctly. "'Thorny hedgehogs be not seen.'"

But the part she truly loved was the part about "the weaving spiders." She'd seen one weave. It had lived in her own conch shell on her father's desk. She'd fed it gnats. In a sense it was her very own. To stand here at the desk and say out loud the lovely words about 'the long-legged spinners' was worth any punishment there was to come.

✧ PART TWO ✧

YOUTH

CHAPTER X

Family decisions happened late at night and out of hearing. Suddenly something happened that seemed to Meg momentous, and was an accomplished fact.

Quite unexpectedly to her, Grandma and Grandpa Simmons were living here on Cushing Street; were living here for good. And constantly her mother was trying hard to make things go and smoothing ruffled feelings somewhere in the house.

She had just come upstairs to the study where Meg was already doing what she could to ease the strain by getting her father to help her with her Latin lesson. Her mother wasn't ever cross with him when he had lost his temper suddenly. She knew that he was sorry and ashamed.

"Whitman," she began, "Grandpa Simmons didn't mean to bother you. Not for worlds would he disturb you purposely."

Meg watched her father go over to his work table and pretend that he was busy with his plant press, tidying the big gray blotting papers and clamping down the iron screws.

"Grandpa didn't even want to have you know he'd done an errand for you." Meg's mother often used that explanation. "He thought that if he mailed your letters without telling you, he'd be helpful without anybody's knowing."

Meg knew how her father felt because he kept his back turned. "I'm not a brute," he said. "I have the ordinary, decent, civil instincts. Would I have snapped his head off if he'd come and asked me?"

"But, Whitman," her mother begged. "He can't come to you and ask. That's just what he can't do. He likes to have us feel he isn't even in the house."

As she spoke, Meg was conscious of her mother's thoughts. At night, as they all sat about the lamp, they hardly noticed Grand-

father until quietly with his Old Testament held out to it, he stole in upon the glow. Then sometimes her mother grew aware of him. "Father, you'll put your eyes out with that print," she'd say. As though he really read. What he wanted was to find some fine old word like righteousness and he'd know the other words that went with it. But almost as soon as he was spoken to, he'd rise. "I think I'll say good night to you," he'd say and soon they'd hear him going slowly up the stairs.

"What would you like to have me do?" Meg heard her father say at last. He was still ashamed to turn. "Shall I apologize?"

"No," her mother said. "He wouldn't even hear you."

Meg could see her father bending and shouting as though he were hallooing through thick fog and she could see her grandfather with his hand curved stiffly like a conch shell. "Is there anything that I can do for you?" he'd say; and on his face would come a pleased, expectant look.

"What I wish you'd do," her mother said, "is just to beg some little favor of him."

And it was amazing, come to think of it, the wants that her grandfather could supply. Pencils. When no one else could find one, he always had an extra stub, cramping to the fingers, but whittled to the neatest point. String. Any kind you liked, spread out methodically on his thin hand in a row of little bobbins with the ends tucked neatly in. Notepaper, too, though only when you had to have it and didn't mind its being thin and yellowy and having the faintest suspicion of pale lines. And somehow it was right that they should make these small demands of him. If they hadn't needed him occasionally, he would have gone drifting off on a gray sea of memories, further and further out.

Meg was sure that was the reason why her mother let him do the marketing despite the long trudge up and down the hill and the bundles that he would lug home.

"Just ask him for some penny stamps," her mother was saying at the moment. "That's all you need to do to please him. He'll forget that you were cross with him."

"Cross," Meg's father said. "I wasn't cross. I was in a towering, thundering rage. I behaved just like a blackguard and a bully to your father. It's his meekness that infuriates me. Let the meek

inherit the whole earth, but before they do, for God's sake give an ordinary cuss like me some chance of getting out of it. Don't ask him to consort. Don't force him to live under the same roof."

But that was exactly what her mother'd done. It was the only thing, her mother had said, that she could do now that her brother had married somebody who didn't mean to have his parents live with them. She couldn't leave them in New York where they weren't wanted, could she?

Meg wondered what would have happened if her father had said he didn't want them either. Was it fair to make him share his house with people whom he couldn't even talk with?

"If the old gentleman," he was protesting, "would only pay me back in my own coin."

There wasn't any use expecting that. The fierce, resistant spring inside of Grandfather was gone.

"If it weren't for his humility," Meg's father's voice was going on, "I could stand all the rest of it."

"No, Darling, no you couldn't." Her mother spoke in the way she did when he amused her. Though other people made her laugh, only he could make her smile as though she hoped he'd go on being difficult and outside any law of common sense or reason. "Think of the moon, the constant moon; think of the way you act when Grandpa Simmons starts to tinker with it."

"Tinker with it. That's one thing he can't do." This was a matter that always put to rout all other irritations.

"Of course he can't. That's why it seems so silly to be so disturbed by him. If he wants to say the moon is rising over Benevolent Street tonight and that tomorrow will be warmer, what harm possibly . . ."

"Because he'll have it over Olney Street tomorrow night," Meg had known her father would be sure to interrupt. "Because he'll switch it over there in just one night with half a city in between. Does he think the moon goes gallivanting clear across the sky with no relation to celestial laws? Does he think the moon's a common jade?"

"Grandpa's never heard about a common jade," Meg's mother said. "That's not the word they call it in his Bible. And there isn't any sense in treating him as though he'd heard of science. Even

the law of gravitation never got to Simmonsville. Before I married you, I never heard of it."

Meg watched her father smile.

"When you married me," he said, "you saw the law of gravitation work. The pity of it is that you were only starting in to soar."

"I'm still soaring. You needn't think I've stopped," her mother said. "Remember when you didn't think that I could run a school? Well, I ran a good one, didn't I? And I sold it for a good price, didn't I? And now I've got a good position down in Boston, haven't I? Soon I'll be a partner."

"If you want to call that soaring." From her father's tone of voice Meg was conscious that he had meant something else.

"It is," her mother said. "It's getting somewhere."

What it really was, was making both ends meet. Not that Grandpa and Grandma Simmons needed much. But what needs they had were Mother's business. If Father had them here beneath his roof, the very least that she could do, she said, was to go out and earn the money to provide for them. Besides, she always added, even if it weren't for them, there were all the things she meant to give her children. Not merely private school and dancing school and music lessons, but college for them both. And no matter how she skimped and saved, a college education was a thing she'd never manage, not on a professor's salary.

"Anyhow," she was saying at the moment, "we don't have to worry about my going off to Boston, not on Sunday."

"We have to worry over Sunday dinner," Meg heard her father say. "We have to worry over how we're going to keep our tempers."

"But Grandpa isn't going to talk about the moon, not at this time of day," her mother said. "He won't say another word when he's once asked the blessing."

"Your mother will."

"Yes, Mother will, but Meg can sit between you. Be a good girl," she begged. "Run down and sit with Grandmother till dinner time. Do try to get her into a good mood."

Could anyone do that? Meg wondered. Grandmother's bitter, angry moods came out of nowhere for no reason. At the slightest

word, she faced the family with the fighter's spirit snapping out of fierce old eyes.

Hurrah, then, for her spunk! It kept her safe from pity; pity that was like a slow warm tide in the way it crept upon old age. Only of course it was Grandmother's spunk that made things difficult. She liked things her way. If you made her bed, before your back was turned, she had it all apart again. If you dusted off her mantelpiece—and for a silent joke—put back an ornament where it had been precisely, you'd see her move it this way, that way. Try as you would, you couldn't suit.

Right now Grandmother wasn't in the big, high-ceilinged room that had been fixed for her and Grandpa. There was the great carved rosewood bed in which they slept, thinking what about each other? It must seem strange to lie beside an old, old man and think about the time when you had married him. Awful really, to have him lying there so close night after night as long as you both lived, a person whom you didn't want to speak to or to touch.

At any rate, Grandmother was downstairs in the dining room. She was standing on the register with her little sacque wrapped tight around her and her skirts ballooning out from the hot blast of furnace air.

"I thought this was the Sabbath day," she said as Meg came near. "I thought you'd turned a Unitarian."

That was her way. If this morning, Gid had stopped for Meg to go with him to Sunday school, she knew it would have been another story. "Back when I was a girl," Grandmother would have said. "I didn't have to flirt around from one church to another to suit some boy I was acquainted with. I let him seek me out in my own church. I had some pride."

But today she hadn't mentioned Gid, and Meg didn't mean to have him mentioned.

"Grandpa went to church for all of us," she said.

He had. Meg had seen him getting ready. The straightening of his black string tie, the spots washed off so carefully in the reverse of the long mirror, the brushing of his hat and overcoat had all seemed part of his meek service of the Lord. And Meg had been enough with him to know the way he sat in the white

pew that he always sat in. If he couldn't hear the sermon, it was as though he found a restful bigness in the silence that went soaring up and up until it found the dome. Besides, there were the hymns. His voice had its own lilt for them and he put belief into the way he sang the words.

While Meg was thinking of him, Grandmother came forth with one of her remarks.

"Your grandfather would have to do a lot of going," she began, "to make up for this household. I never thought I'd have to dwell in heathen tents or live to see my daughter turned a heathen by her husband. Better a millstone round his neck," she uttered solemnly.

That was the millstone that Meg really used to think she saw about her father's neck when Grandmother'd first talked of it. It was the last part of the warning that had freed her of her terror. "Better a millstone round his neck than he should entreat one of my little ones." Mother surely wasn't anybody's little one and no one, even Grandma, dared entreat her.

"Nobody," Meg said, "can lead my mother into doing anything she doesn't want to do. If she doesn't go to any church, it hasn't got one thing to do with Father. He's never tried to hold me back. He doesn't mind my going to the Unitarian."

"You'd be turning Roman Catholic," Grandmother said, "if that young Gideon should want you to turn Papist. You'd be fetching palm leaves home. I don't know what you wouldn't fetch into this house if he was at the bottom of it."

If this was the mood that Grandmother was in, dinner wasn't going to be so very peaceful. And there wasn't any time left now to change her temper. Everyone was coming to the table; even Whitman, who had to be called twice before he'd leave off working on a drawing, had washed off every smudge of charcoal and was in his place.

It seemed too bad that Mother had to worry; for this one meal she tried to make so special. There before her was the big Canton soup tureen and spaced around the table were the big, wide-bordered Canton plates. Soft, smoky blue, they were prettier than the plates used on weekdays. So was the damask tablecloth that got its shimmering pattern from the light that poured through the

west windows. Out in the pantry was old Hartie Cox, who came to help on Sundays. She might be fat and chunky, but her clean white turban added something. Besides, it made her broad black face look blacker and brought out the yellowy white corners of her mischievous old eyes.

But what Meg liked the best of all was that her mother didn't wear a suit or the kind of stiff, starched shirtwaist that she wore on weekdays. She was wearing a real dress like anybody's mother. Around the neck above the soft, dark folds there was a surplice of the palest apple green that gave a sort of lighting to her fairness. Meg could remember when her mother's mouth had been much fuller and her lips less straight and less determined. But now that she was almost forty, her face had shadows that made it look more finely shaped.

At the moment, she had her head bent down till Grandfather said Grace. What was it going to be? Never the usual thanks, but some sentence from the Bible that had a special meaning for him and that came from those long hours of brooding when he sat off in a corner staring down the years.

"'I have never seen the righteous forsaken,' " he began, "'nor have I seen their seed begging bread.' "

Even before the napkins were unfolded, there was a flash from Grandmother.

"Before I'd boast," she said, "I'd take some stock of all the charity I'd had to swallow in a lifetime."

Her gray angry eyes were glancing round the table. Her glance swept right past Grandfather. She knew well enough he couldn't hear her. What she couldn't know was that under the white tablecloth Meg had clasped her father's hand.

But this remark was not the sort that really bothered him. What he couldn't bear was when she started in to tell the dreadful things she'd learned from Cousin Martha Bliss about the army and the life at army posts. When Grandmother started on that subject, Meg didn't blame her father for feeling called on to remember that he was the son, the loyal and devoted son, of a man who'd been an officer and a gentleman. That slur was one insult that he couldn't stand.

And the other was about the South. Grandmother still hated

Southerners; hated them much more since each of her sons had gone to work, she said, and married one. She didn't need to speak about her daughter, who had married someone who was half-Virginian as though it wasn't bad enough to be a Bailey. There were a lot of dreadful things that Grandmother could imply.

But today especially, Meg could tell that her mother didn't mean to let the conversation get uncomfortable. All the while that they'd been having soup, her mother had been talking about the things she saw in the backyard. There wasn't any end to all the things that she could see out of the window; the old black mangy tramp cat that wouldn't let a soul but Grandfather come near and that waited for him on the ash bin; the tight brown buds of the big Persian lilac that were starting in to swell though it was only February, a big clump of snowdrops that was already blooming in the sheltered sunny corner of a wall.

When she rattled on this way, Meg knew her father was amused because the reasons were so obvious. But at the moment, he was smiling at old Hattie whom he liked to call "the malignant and the turbaned Turk."

Out in the pantry Hattie was leaning way down over the dumb-waiter.

"Miss What-ya-call-em down dere," she was calling. "Send me up de dinner, please, marm."

"'I can call spirits from the vasty deep,' " Meg's father quoted at her in a draughty voice. Then after a short pause, he added. "'But will they come when they are called?' "

They did; for soon Meg saw her mother standing up before a big browned roast and deftly cutting off the strings and carving neat, thin slices.

"Shall I save some crackling for you, Whitman?" she was asking.

"In my day," Grandmother spoke without addressing anybody, "in my day, a man took pride in carving. It was held to be a man's accomplishment."

"You'd better serve your mother first," was all Meg heard her father say.

Now that everybody had a plate and the vegetables were being

passed, Whitman was helping out the way he did because he never stopped to think of what he mustn't talk about.

"If I knew how," he said, "I could draw snow. If there was somebody in the whole of Providence to teach me, I could learn how to draw it."

"Snow's just a mess of white," Grandmother said. "I don't see anything to draw about it."

Mother thought about the question differently. "If there was only someone in the whole of Providence," she said, "who could teach you how to do your Latin lessons."

Mr. Winslow couldn't. He insisted that there wasn't any use in trying. Mr. Diman, too, had given up. "What could you do," he'd asked, "with a boy who burst out laughing every time he had to say 'principibus' because he thought it was the funniest sounding word he ever heard of." Mother had laughed when she had told about it. "But all it means," she'd added, "is that I've got to learn the Latin tongue and drum it into him." Every night when she got back from Boston and had had her dinner, she got out the Harkness Grammar and went through the declensions with him, but the next night she had to start all over; they never got ahead.

"I don't see why your father's son should balk at Latin," she was saying at the moment. "Meg can learn so easily."

Always that remark made Whitman cross and already he was scowling.

"Meg doesn't want to learn to draw," he said.

"I do," Meg was insisting.

But she knew that nobody would pay the least attention. Even when she'd won a prize at Art School, her mother's comment had only been, "How nice," as though it didn't truly matter. And when she had tried to push the matter further, hadn't her mother said, "You're going to Bryn Mawr. Somebody's got to earn a living in this family"? There wasn't any use in thinking about going to the Art League in New York.

"I do want to paint and draw," Meg started over, "but not football men with noseguards." Because all through Whitman's books were great padded men with black smudges on their noses. "And not battleships," she added, because there were also pictures

of big boats with guns and turrets. "I don't even want to copy Gibson girls," because more recently Whitman had begun to sketch girls in stiff white skirts and shirtwaists. "I want to do real things the way I see them."

"I don't do noseguards any more or battleships or girls," came Whitman's answer. "I do real things the way I see them. You can just ask Cousin Julia. When I went to visit her, I did a sketch of her manure pit and she told me she could even smell the rats."

"When I was young," Grandmother said, "we didn't talk about manure right at the dinner table. We didn't think it was a pretty word to mention."

"I'm glad I didn't live at Simmonsville," Whitman retorted.

"If you had," Grandmother interrupted, "you'd have been put to doing something with some sense to it. A great strapping boy of your age, you'd have been fetching money home to help your mother. You wouldn't have her traipsing off to Boston while others sat about and read."

"And lalligagged." Father broke in sharply. "I suppose that lalligagging's what you call my work at college. I suppose that's all there is to running a botanical department."

"Whitman," Mother begged, but it was really Grandmother who needed silencing.

"Books and books and books cluttering up the house from top to bottom," she went on. "And when they're read and studied, who's the better for it? I don't see's they furnish bed and board and victuals. So far as I can judge, the more there are, the more my daughter has to work. I never thought I'd live to see her heading off at dawn to break a path through snow and mixing with strange men on trains and depending on strange men for company in blizzards."

She was mentioning all the things that Meg knew her father hated and that made him feel humiliated.

"Grandmother." As her mother spoke, Meg saw her face was very white. "You know I go to work because I choose to work in Boston. You know that Whitman's not to blame for it. He supports this house like any other man. If I want a lot of extras for my children, that's my business, isn't it?"

"A pretty business. That's the very name for it." Grandmother

was going to have her say out. "My husband didn't sit and read a book with me out lost among the elements."

Meg would have felt like laughing if her father hadn't looked so fiercely angry.

"Eliza," he was saying to her mother with great courtesy, "I shall absent myself a while from this felicity."

But before he could fold up his napkin and push back his chair, it was Grandmother who left.

There wasn't any sense in following her. What would happen was what inevitably happened. By now, Grandma was upstairs in her room, packing up the little bag she called her reticule. It had to be just big enough to hold her night things in case nobody came for her. And it had to be just small enough so that it wouldn't be a give-away when she was found and urged to come back home.

Hattie was bringing in the cylinder of caramel ice cream. Her mischievous old eyes were dancing. There was nothing she liked better than Grandma on a rampage.

"Is Mrs. Simmons taken sick?" asked Grandfather in his mild voice as he looked up and found her gone.

"No, Dear, no." As usual, Meg saw her mother shake her head as she picked up a spoon and sliced off a corner of ice cream as though nothing was the matter.

"Professor Seth is coming in tonight," Mother said with careful casualness. "Professor Seth is going to read *The Bonny Briar Bush* out loud to all of us. Manly and Delabarre are coming too. And Dodge, although he hates Scotch dialect. We'll have beer and pretzels and a quiet time."

"What makes you think we'll have a quiet time?" Meg knew her father would be sure to ask that question. "What makes you think that you and the town crier won't be calling through the streets of Providence?"

"Because Meg will be town crier." That was her mother's usual answer. "Once that we've given Grandma time to settle down and have a visit somewhere, Meg will start in search of her. She knows exactly where to find her and she knows exactly how to coax her home."

CHAPTER XI

Grandmother was home and safe in bed. In passing by, Meg had opened the door a crack and by the light that she'd let in, she had seen a puckered little face screwed up in sleep. By the time that morning came, the tempest would have ceased and Grandmother would be thinking up some very special favors that she'd like to do for "Mr. Bailey," but she would save her pride by keeping to her room for three whole days.

This time she had been hard to find. When she really had a tantrum, she never stopped at any of the Simmonses'. She liked to state that she was thankful that she was no blood relation to them; to Si Simmons most especially. He was the one of Grandpa's brothers who had wanted her to sell her useless dower rights in the old mill and who had offered in exchange a house that he would build for her exactly to her liking. "Any house you built for me," she'd said, "would warp and roll down hill," but she had sounded as though she'd meant to send it pitching forward with a spiteful shove.

This afternoon, Meg had had to climb the high flight of stone steps to Aunt Dyer's and to stand until she heard a heavy chain slipped off the lock and saw a front door open. She had had to follow the old servant through the closed-off frosty hall and sit waiting in the twilight of the unused parlor. And since she hadn't wished to come right out and ask for Grandmother, she had had to find out that she wasn't there by calling on a fierce old lady with sad, sagging, red-rimmed eyes, who had made Meg think of some old mastiff that didn't want to be disturbed.

Cousin Annie was quite different. The moment that Meg had stepped inside her house, Cousin Annie had greeted her by saying, "Wherever Aunt Jane is, I'd give her time to get a little anxious. Take off your things and you'll find Carrie in the sitting room. She's playing the piano to a raft of boys. They need another girl. Go in and join them."

But that was exactly what Meg wouldn't do for worlds. She had known how it would be.

In a warm, friendly room that was her very own, Carrie would be sitting before a little upright Steinway. Even her long, blond pig-tail with its big black ribbon bow didn't make her look so young as Meg felt. And all around her, boys would be glowering at each other or leaping up to turn a page when she let a tune drift off to nothingness, or planning how to be the last to leave.

For Meg to go into that room was to feel big and clumsy and to know that she was scared of boys. Carrie, Meg's mother said, could handle any number of them. It would be good practice to sit right down and watch her doing it and then to copy her. As though it was as easy as all that.

At any rate, Cousin Annie hadn't forced Meg to come in and after three more places, she had found her grandmother who had grown impatient waiting and who was standing outside on the Nichols' porch.

"They grew too pert," Grandmother had announced at once. "They put me questions that they had no business to. When they got to dwelling on your father, I told them I'd start home. I was just starting."

Not that she really was. What she required was someone who would go before her and clear the way for her to reach her room upstairs in safety and in dignity. Now that she was there, she'd stay there for awhile, pretending to be hurt and proud.

For what Meg had done, her mother was so grateful that she wouldn't let her help to fix the table for the party.

"You've done enough," she said. "Go have some fun. Do something that you want to. I do wish you'd have some boys in."

Suppose they really came. Where, Meg wondered, could she take them when her mother's friends were going to use the parlor and the dining room? Even Grandpa would have to go upstairs to the room he shared with Grandmother. Somebody would have to shout at him and make him understand that he would have to leave his armchair and depart when it got near the time for guests to come.

"You could stay downstairs with us," Meg's mother was suggesting. "Perhaps it's time you did. That might be the best way for you to learn to feel at ease with people."

"I don't want to stay downstairs," Meg said. "Professor Seth

is going to read out loud in Scotch and then you're going to talk about it. That's not the kind of thing that Carrie talks about to boys."

"I don't suppose it is," her mother said. "But I hate to have you mooning by yourself. I never did at your age."

That was the point they always reached; that Mother had never been embarrassed or self-conscious. That was because she'd never thought about herself or how she looked or what she wore because she'd been too busy thinking about other people. "And I never had," she'd say, "half your advantages. I never heard good conversation till I met your father." She couldn't understand how much that might have helped.

But some time back, Meg had noticed that tiny flakes of snow were driving hard against the window panes and clotting them in big white patches.

"I'm not going to moon," she said. "Gid's coming."

For he usually did in a real snowstorm.

"You could ask your father for his study," her mother was suggesting. "He likes Gid. Tell your father that you'd like to sit upstairs and talk there."

"No," Meg said, "Gid never sits and talks." She laughed to think of how Gid used to say, "My father doesn't walk, he rides." Gid never really sat. As far back as she could remember, he had always kept his body busy. Any remark of his that she recalled, he had made while he was whittling with a jackknife or while his brown, strong hands were firming earth about the roots of plants out in the garden or while he was striding with her at a rapid pace.

"I don't see why you take such stock in Gid," her mother said. "It always seems to be some other boy who asks you for the German. It's Amey Willson whom Gid asks. Isn't that what counts?"

"Of course it counts. In lots of ways he likes her best. But he likes me, too, in very special ways."

"They seem to be the queerest special ways." As her mother spoke, Meg knew that she was thinking about the last day of dancing school. That would be happening in another month and her mother didn't want to have to say that her daughter's partner was Jack Baxter. "Why on earth," she would remark,

"the most unattractive fat boy in the town should ask you weeks and weeks ahead and why you couldn't think up some excuse and tell him that you were engaged? . . ."

Meg knew that conversation was ahead of her. But meanwhile the world was growing white. The flakes were flying faster.

"Gid likes me when it rains," Meg said. Because he did. Because she could think back to times at Little Compton when they'd gone out in a driving storm and had the whole beach to themselves. The more the wind had turned the reeds to whipcords round their legs and stung their faces with salt scud, the better they had liked it. "Gid likes me when it rains, but," she added proudly, "he likes me still more when it snows."

"You have the strangest way," her mother said at last, "of being wilder than a hawk. Wilder than a hawk and fiercer. You might come out of *Wuthering Heights*. Or is it Greek mythology I'm thinking of? It's some book anyhow that's all mixed up with what your grandmother calls the elements. I don't know where you get it from. Not from your father certainly. He minds even thunderstorms; and I don't even know they're there. I never notice weather."

That was true. She didn't. It was everybody else who worried when she set off to Boston in a blizzard. How many times, Meg knew, she had watched her mother start off at dawn, plunging down the big soft drift on their front steps, breaking her way out to the center of the street and disappearing down the hill to catch her train as though she didn't even see the snow banks or saw them only with contempt.

Anyhow they didn't have to go on with their argument, for Gid had come as Meg had known he would. Now that she had let him in and he had to wait in the front hall to keep from scattering snow on everything, his rough coat looked like fleece. So did his cap. They made his skin look very dark and brown. It was the right way for it to look to match his straight black meeting eyebrows and his thin nose and his high cheekbones. It was his mouth that didn't match; for it was uncertain and it wasn't proud.

"Meg's going out with me," he called out to her mother the moment that he'd seen her in the dining room. Long ago he had

discovered that the thing to do was to make a quick announcement to her before she had the chance to give an order. The queer thing was that she seemed to like to have him be high-handed. She even let him make himself at home and do things in her house in a way that no else had dared to try.

Soon Meg was with Gid outside in a world that had few landmarks. The little Maxcey house across the street was blotted out completely, and the one lamplight was a faint blurred halo, and the lighted windows of the houses seemed very high and dim and far away. It was so still that Meg could hear the sifting of the snow as they passed the Beckwiths' sheeted garden where the covered fountain made an imprint on the whiteness by a cone of even deeper white. Already the evergreens were thickly plumed and the shrubs tufted; and as they went along the silent street, the boughs of the big elms shook down from time to time a shower of powder that thickened the fine blowing flakes.

Walking this way with Gid was better far than dancing with him. This was a step that Meg knew how to keep and a time that she knew how to follow. A while back, his pace had quickened and hers had too without her feeling he was leading. Now that it had slackened, his was slower.

"Suppose," he said at last, "they'd sent us out. I mean the way they send us out on errands for them."

"I wouldn't think that I was having fun. If I had to search for Grandmother tonight, I'd think that I was being put upon," Meg said. "I'd think that I was going to die exhausted on a doorstep."

"No," Gid said, "I wouldn't. But I'd think it was a good excuse to say I was exhausted to somebody that my father'd rather that I didn't say it to. I'd pick the very one that my father'd hate the most to have me tell that he'd forced me out of doors on such a night."

Meg was still keeping step with him, but Gid's thoughts had gone off on a track she didn't want to follow. Years and years ago hadn't her own Cousin Will who, everybody thought, was savage and embittered, taught her not to let the beauty of a tree get all mixed up with hate? Then what about the beauty of a night like this?

"I know the very house I'd pick for spite," Gid said. "I'd pick out Mrs. William Goddard's."

Mrs. Goddard. When Meg thought of her, she saw a lady standing with a lovely, haughty, frozen face as she waited for her carriage in the lobby of the Providence Opera House. Of all the houses in the whole of Providence, hers seemed the most forbidding. Almost never was it open because the Goddards had a daughter who was married to a French Marquis and spent their time abroad and were reputed to consider their own city very dull and quite old-fashioned.

"They aren't ever home," Meg ventured.

"Yes they are," Gid said. "Last week they had a party for a girl from Newport and my father made me go to it."

That put Gid in a distant splendid world that might as well have been the world of royalty. Nobody whom Meg knew got asked to any party at the Goddards'.

"I would have been too scared to go," she said.

"I wasn't scared," Gid said. "I didn't want to go and lead their old cotillion. It was much stuffier than those at dancing-school. But now I know that Mrs. Goddard's house is the one I'd pick to spite my father. He told me that I was to make a good impression and that I wasn't to go off and make friends with the butler and the footmen, and that for once I was to keep to my own level."

Though the falling flakes had turned to sleet which was pelting hard against her face, Meg laughed. There wasn't any house where Gid didn't get a special greeting from the servants.

"Did you make friends with the butler, Gid?" she asked.

"What do you think?" he said. "My father'd told me not to, hadn't he? I led the German first and saw that everybody got a lot of favors. Then I did something that I bet my father didn't think I'd dare to do. I went right up and talked to Mrs. Goddard as though she was just anybody. It's then I asked her if I couldn't see the picture gallery that's supposed to have a real Murillo. That's how I got out to the butler's pantry."

"What did the butler do?"

"Do?" Gid said. "At first he didn't like it when I started going round the shelves and picking up a piece or two to see if they

were genuine. But I showed him how to tell what was just junk and what was really good. I got him interested."

For a boy, Gid did know about the oddest things; old silver and old furniture and particularly porcelain and china. Even in her house on Cushing Street, Meg knew the way he loved to poke around and say what should be trotted out and what should be put away.

"But I don't see why the butler should have cared to know about the plates," Meg said. "Why should he?"

"He has to kowtow to the Goddards, doesn't he?" Gid's step had quickened and his voice had grown excited. "He's not supposed to know what's good. It's a way of getting even when he sets the table with the other and trots the poor stuff out."

Because Meg didn't understand, Gid was explaining.

"That's exactly what I do with Father's Corot that isn't a real Corot. Ever since I found that out, I show that painting off when people want to look at his collection. Every chance I get, I call attention to it. I pay him back that way."

Pay him back for what? Meg wished that she didn't know. But a memory could be as clear as what was happening at the moment. In an instant she could feel that she was standing on the runners of a Russian sleigh with Gid and taking joy in the bright horse-hair plumes as much as in the sliding swiftness of the motion. From where she sat, wrapped up in a rich sable robe, Mrs. Codman had been talking to them. Then suddenly she had been silent with a silence that was awful. Her face had turned into a frozen and averted profile. Then had come awareness. So a lady looked when she saw her husband driving towards her and then passing by her with another lady. She didn't even bow to him. She withdrew into a world where he did not exist.

"Sometimes," Gid was saying, "my father thinks that I've got rotten taste when I show off his fake Corot. Sometimes he thinks that I've got something on him."

"Gid," Meg begged, "please don't. You don't know how dreadful you can make it sound."

"I know how dreadful he can make me feel," Gid answered back. "It's all right for you to talk. You don't have to stand the things that I do; things I'm not supposed to understand about."

It's because I do that he likes to lord it over me. He takes it out on me that way. I can't bring anybody home who's ever grand enough to suit him. He says I'm always making friends with underdogs."

Meg thought of the few times when Gid had been allowed to ask her home to dinner.

"Your father never treats me like an underdog," she said.

"That's because you are a girl." Gid spoke as though he meant to hurt. "Besides," he added, "Father likes your looks. He says you'll never be a beauty like your mother, but he says that you've got something different. He's always saying that in five years you won't have any use for me, not when you've been really roused."

Roused how? There was something awful in the way an old man put things.

"I wish he wouldn't talk about me," Meg spoke quickly. Then she wheeled about. "I'm cold," she said. "I'm going home."

Gid had slipped an arm in hers and had turned so that the hail was driving at their backs. Before them, the white world was turning into crystal.

"I'm sorry that I said that," Gid began. "But you were taking Father's part. I had to show you how he spoils things."

Meg kept walking on in silence. Beneath her feet, the crust of sleet that covered the soft carpet was crunching with each step. She could hear the little twigs snap off and tinkle as they fell.

"All the same, he can't spoil everything," Gid said.

"You can," Meg said. "You're always doing it."

Gid was talking on as though he hadn't heard her.

"Even if I have to go into the mills," he said, "I'm going to own a place that's all my own. It's going to be exactly as I want it."

"With fuchsias out in front," she mocked, "and the real garden out behind the stable. That's what you used to say. You don't dare to do the things you want to do. You're scared of having people laugh at you."

"I won't be when I own my place," he said. "That's the only sense in having money. Everything I thought I'd have to grow way out in back is going to be in front. If I want to dig up weeds and plant them right at my front gate, I will."

"Who's going to come and look at them? Nobody," Meg said.

"Yes," he said. "You'll come. You'll pretend you're being grand. You'll pretend you've come to see the oleanders. You'll tell me that the Baileys had them out at Hillwood."

Hillwood! How long ago she'd gone there as a little girl and made friends with her Cousin Will. It seemed even long ago since he had died. And after Great-uncle William's death, Hillwood had been broken up and sold. But all of a sudden it seemed warm and comforting and safe to think back to the time when Gid and she had sat together on the Maxceys' porch and he had told her of the birthday party for the century plant.

"Remember how mad you got," Meg said, "when I didn't stop to see the gatehouse out at Hillwood? You got so mad, you went right off and dug up weeds. Even now when you get cross, that's what you still do in a way."

"I won't be cross," he said, "when I can plant weeds where I like. I won't even mind it when you come and criticize."

"Criticize," Meg said.

"Yes," he said, "you'll be the only one that I'll allow to."

By this time, they were sliding arm in arm down Cushing Street. The trunks of the great elms were coated thick with ice, and overhead the heavy branches creaked and glittered.

"Do you suppose we'll always quarrel, Gid?" Meg asked as they stood on her front steps.

"Yes," he said. "Our quarrels are the things that are important."

As he spoke, he opened the front door for her and in a moment he was striding down the street.

CHAPTER XII

Now that it was spring and the sun rose earlier, Meg didn't have to grope about to help her mother find her things before the time came for setting out to catch the train to Boston. They could sit down to breakfast with each other, but they seldom really talked.

Today, however, Meg was aware of a close scrutiny.

"I do wish," her mother said at last, "that you could get over

being quite so sensitive. People don't mind your father's being poor. What they love him for is his simplicity."

"But suppose I can't be simple?"

"Why not? There's everything about your life to keep you simple, isn't there?"

"Not when it's always being muddled up by everyone."

"Muddled up?" Meg heard her mother ask. "Who muddles it? Only you because you seem to think I treat your brother differently. I'd rather bring up fifty boys. They never get hurt feelings. If anything, I spend more time on you. Can't you always ask girls home to lunch?"

Meg had to nod. But Mother ought to understand that it wasn't fun to bring them home when at the table there were Grandmother and Grandfather sitting by each other and never taking part in any conversation, and being awfully old.

"If you're so ashamed of your own house, why don't you mind Gid's plunging into it at any hour he likes? I'm sure he makes himself at home here. If it's good enough for him, it should be good enough for other boys."

"It is good enough," Meg said.

"You don't do much to make them think so."

"Mother," Meg begged, "it isn't that."

And it wasn't. Meg felt that she loved the parlor all the more because she could remember when it was a kindergarten cluttered up with desks and maps. Sometimes, even now, it still seemed strange to her and she stopped to look at it from different angles. What's more, no one had a greater knack than Mother had of making even little ornaments look gay because they caught bright colors from each other. Mother could take the dingiest old chairs and upholster them herself with some piece of fabric that she'd saved. Whatever it was she did, she made it give the room a kind of warmth and glow.

But what she couldn't do was to make the wide, white-panelled doors to the front parlor really close. Always there was a yellow seam of light to the dining room beyond. And through it drifted bits of family conversation. There came the moment when Grandfather said he thought he'd better go upstairs to bed and the later awful moment when Father said he thought he'd toddle up. No

other father would ever talk of toddling up. Any girl would be embarrassed by that word.

Except in front of Gid. Instead of thinking it was time for him to leave, he went out to have a word with Father and sometimes he disappeared for half an hour. But with every other boy, there were times when she hoped he'd never come again. Yet that she couldn't talk about. It would be better if she changed the subject.

"I'm only sensitive," she said, "at school."

At once her mother was concerned.

"You mean," she said, "because I pay Miss Bowen only half tuition for you. But that's what's done for every teacher's child. It's customary."

There wasn't any other teacher's child in the whole school to make it customary.

"It does make Miss Bowen treat me differently," Meg said. "It's why she keeps on lecturing me about my attitude."

"Your attitude." Mother made the word sound silly. "The trouble is," she said, "you have a hundred attitudes and you're no more conscious of them than you were of the Cilician Queen."

That was mean of her; and Meg had bolted from the dining room. But anybody'd bolt if she was continually being teased about saying things that had some stupid other meaning. All she'd done, Meg knew, was to translate her Greek exactly as it went. "And it is said that Cyrus knew the Cilician Queen." "I thought he knew her long ago," Meg had remarked because it seemed so awfully dull to keep on saying so. But the little crescent birthmark on Miss Jordan's face had grown bright crimson and she had announced that a girl could be precocious somewhere else, not in her class. Even when Meg had talked the matter over with her father, he hadn't made the meaning very clear. If "knew" was Biblical for getting married, what was the harm in coming out with that?

She could hear her mother starting off to Boston, but though Meg answered her "good bye," she didn't feel like saying more.

As she sat in the parlor thinking over her mistakes, she was sure nobody'd ever been more surprised than she when she'd been sent down to Miss Bowen's private office and been told that she'd been rude in mimicking Miss Austen.

"Resurgo, resurgere," Miss Austen had a way of saying. "Resurrexi, resurrectum. 'The resurrection of our Lord.'"

With that addition at the end, the whole verb sounded beautiful. But it seemed that Miss Austen was High Church. And for Meg to say "The resurrection of our Lord" was blasphemous because of what was called her father's "stand." Because he was a scientist and an agnostic, Miss Bowen had declared, was no reason why she should allow his daughter to make light of religious matters and spread his influence among the pupils in her school. Henceforth it would be wiser if Meg stayed away from Prayers.

One thing, Meg knew. That day Father had been simply furious and had wanted to take her straight out of school for what he called a piece of damnable impertinence. He'd said that there was more philosophy in his mind's eye than Miss Bowen ever dreamed of and that he'd teach his daughter and see to it that she learned some tolerance. "But tolerance won't get her to Bryn Mawr," her mother'd argued. "If Meg's going to get there, someone's got to teach her algebra."

That her father couldn't do, but it was because he hated what had happened that he read aloud to her so much. Even Plato he could make exciting, especially the death of Socrates. But it wasn't always Plato. Sometimes it was Emerson and Thoreau; men he'd known to speak to and whose ways of living he discussed. Or to have what he liked to call a shameless gorge, he might read Marion Crawford. Right now it was Maurice Hewlett. It was Maurice Hewlett that Meg loved the best of all.

Richard Yea and Nay and *Forest Lovers* and above all *Earthworks Out of Tuscany*. In *Earthworks Out of Tuscany* each heroine had a way of dying at the end and of dying very beautifully. The lovely words that nobody spoke in life, came flooding out with her last breath.

That was exactly what Meg had made them do in the story she'd just written. She had had to lay the scene in Italy because she'd wanted so to use a few of the Italian words that were more moving than plain English. When she read her story to the class today even Miss Jordan would be moved. So would the girls. They couldn't help being.

"Have a good day," her father called to Meg as she put on her

new hat that rustled with a wreath of bright green wheat around its crown of yellow straw and started off to school.

This was the time of year in which she'd made her story happen. Spring with her heroine knowing that in another year she wouldn't be alive to see it!

How would she feel herself? Meg thought. Suppose she knew that never again would she see the larch trees spurt out little jets of flame. If she truly knew that she was going to die, she'd stop to stare at them as she was doing now. She'd pause this way to notice every bed of purple and yellow crocuses in front of every house the length of Angell Street. And certainly before she turned this corner, she'd linger just as she was lingering to gaze up at the white magnolia that crowned the Sheldons' steep grass bank.

Not that she could feel as deeply as Alice Sheldon would, if she were bidding it farewell forever. That tree was Alice's in some mysterious way. She said it bloomed for her. She said that on the day she married, she would look down from her bedroom window in the dawn and it would tell her if her choice was right. She would have to fold her wedding veil away and send back all her presents if the thick, white creamy petals stayed in bud and didn't open like a bride's bouquet.

Which would be hard upon the bridegroom because he would have crossed the ocean all the way from Italy or Germany or France. He was going to be a titled foreigner with tenantry and vast estates. Not that Alice had seen him yet. He wasn't one of those she'd met last summer on her trip abroad. Not Etien who wrote her on the thinnest foreign paper and who signed himself "devoué." Not the one whose strange soft name Alice loved to say. Hilmé Isalam-Bey. Every time she said that name, she closed her eyes and deepened his renunciation. If Hilmé only hadn't been an Arab. But as it was, he'd have to go back to his desert and keep to his own faith. Her husband would be someone else.

It was when she talked too much about him that Sara Claffin said she wouldn't dream of marrying anyone but an American. She was going to boarding school in Washington to learn to talk to diplomats. In diplomatic circles, it was, she said, the way it was in England where a wife made all the difference to a man's career.

Alice and Sara were the only ones who seemed to be so very

sure about their futures. Virginia said that she preferred "fast men" because they were the most attractive and Mildred Jastrum said that her first husband must be very old and very rich and that she actually meant to be divorced.

This was the kind of heavenly spring day on which Meg felt she ought to know the kind of man she meant to marry. Not someone like Gid whom she'd known all her life so that there was no mystery about him. It would be fun to have it be an older man who had a hidden past and who was experienced with women. He would know how to tame her till she came submissive to his hand. A woman should be mastered. That was how she knew she was in love. She didn't quarrel and get stubborn as Meg knew she did with Gid.

Now that she had reached school, she could hear the Sousa March that meant that Prayers were over and that, though she was the daughter of a scientist and an agnostic, she could take off her hat and go up to the College Room. Only that she had dawdled for so long upon her way that she had to hurry into her first class.

Now that other recitations had passed safely and that she was having English, here she was with all her friends, sitting in the Studio. English, Miss Bowen said, necessitated an informal atmosphere and in this room the walls were varnished green and and on a pedestal there was a dark red sandstone bust of Hermes with a baby's hand stuck on one shoulder. Over the huge brick fireplace was a dusty seine draped like a scarf and on the mantel was a copper bowl filled with dried bittersweet. There were no desks, but studio chairs that could be arranged in a close group.

Hers, Meg had moved next to Miss Jordan. This was the place where she could face her audience. She meant to hold them spell-bound and to linger over every lovely line.

At last the time had come. The girls were glad it was her turn; even Carrie, who wrote to Harvard men and Princeton Juniors.

"The scene is laid in Italy," Meg told the class before she started.

"Have you often been there?" asked Miss Jordan.

"No," Meg said. "I never have. But I've read lots about it. I know exactly how it looks."

"It would seem a little wiser at your age," Miss Jordan said, "to keep to your locale and a scene with which you are familiar."

What? Keep to Cushing Street? Keep to the Maxceys' yard? If she kept to them, Meg knew she'd never find a thing to write.

Now that she'd begun to read, she was proving that she didn't need to go to Italy before she wrote about it. Sometimes the sky she told about was azure and sometimes cerulean as it was in Maurice Hewlett's stories and off in the distance lay the Mediterranean, sapphire blue. On the hills were age-old olive trees and dark, pointed cypresses. In the grotto were pink cyclamen that fluttered though the day was sultry and there was no breeze to stir the languorous air.

"Languorous" was a word that she seemed to keep on saying pretty often, but it was a lovely word and one that seemed to suit the story of a heroine who had an oval face and lustrous hair and a slim golden body that was worshipped by all painters but reserved for one whose fame had come from painting only her, his Filomena. His tragedy would lie ahead in looking round his studio and being mocked by portraits of the beauty that he could not keep alive despite his love. Each day he took her in his arms and grieving to find his burden less and less, he carried her to the warm sun. Each day, she bravely smiled at him, content to know that she would die with him beside her.

Meg had almost reached the end. The room was silent and her audience was listening spellbound. Only she must be careful not to cry herself and spoil the climax. She was reading slowly as she came to the last page. Here was the end, and she had saved her voice for it.

"'Carissimo,' she murmured; and with her lips close to his, she died."

When Meg looked up, Martie was dabbing at her eyes with a little wad of handkerchief. Alice Sheldon's gaze was far away as though she was thinking of Hilmé in his far Arabian desert. Everyone was moved.

But Miss Jordan didn't like the story. Even before she spoke, the little tell-tale birthmark on her temple was bright red.

"You may hand your composition in to me," she was saying.

In a second she had torn it crosswise and put it in the scrap-basket.

"There," she said, "that is the proper place for trash. But tomorrow morning you will hand me in another paper. And I can think of no severer penalty than to require you to hand in a paper that sticks to plain bare facts."

Even her mother, Meg found to her surprise, seemed to know that was an awful penalty. When at last she did get home from Boston and was told about it, she sat right down and let Meg lean her head close to a shoulder that was suddenly protective.

"I wouldn't let Miss Jordan know I cared a hoot," her mother's voice was saying. "If I had to do a composition for her dealing with the plain bare facts, I'd give her ones she wouldn't like."

"I don't believe," Meg said, "that I know anything that's very horrid. Not that I could write about."

She couldn't write about the stories and the explanations of them that she sometimes heard in school.

"Of course you don't," her mother said. "I was only being silly. That's the way I get when someone wants to hurt you. But go upstairs and talk it over with your father. He's the wisest person whom I know. He'll suggest a way to handle this."

Meg found her father upstairs in his study. As he lay on the couch beneath the Welsbach lamp, a hard white light was beating down upon the open pages of his book. But he stopped reading when he learned why she had come to him.

"There's one thing, Chickie, that we ought to straighten out," he started. "Mind you, I think Miss Jordan should have treated your work seriously. There's never an excuse for ridicule. But she chanced to hit on something you might profit by."

"What did she chance to hit on?" Meg couldn't help it if she sounded injured.

Her father meant to take his time. He'd fixed the pillows at his back and he was lighting a cigar.

"Your teacher wanted you to stick to facts," he said. "You've never liked facts very much. You've much preferred a world that you created. Remember the long story that you wrote about yourself and Hillwood? Remember how you made yourself the heroine?"

"I wrote that story long ago," Meg argued.

"Not so long ago," he said, "that I've forgotten how it opened. 'Margaret, the young heiress of Hillwood, moved among her guests with the grace and bearing of a queen.'"

"If it was so awfully funny I don't see why you didn't tell me."

"Because," he said, "ever since you've been a little girl, you've needed room of some sort. Once it was room enough for fancy. Life on Cushing Street was pretty cramped. But it may be time for you to curb your fancy. You might try to write of Hillwood as it really was."

"It was very beautiful," Meg was insisting.

"If you still see it with that kind of glamour, then I wouldn't tackle it," he said. "This time I'd have a whack at sticking to the accurate truth."

"Hillwood was beautiful," Meg said. "It truly was. If you'll let me work up here, then you can read my paper when I'm through and see if I don't stick to plain bare facts."

But first she had to go downstairs to get the kind of paper that she liked. In the side drawer of her mother's slant-topped desk was the kind of yellow pads that were so nice to use.

Meg had lit the gas and helped herself, but a white page of notepaper had sifted halfway through a crack above and when she tried to edge it back, it fluttered down. Written words were staring up at her. They were in her mother's neat decisive hand.

"How could you think that I would ever dream of leaving Whitman?" the words ran. "How could you think that I would ever leave the children?"

But mothers didn't leave. Only Ethel Vinton's mother had. And she had run off with a man because she was plain bad and had been a common mill girl in the Vinton mills and had caught Mr. Vinton's eye, so people said, by being flashy.

"I don't see anything for us to do," the letter read, "but to try to save our friendship out of this."

Save friendship out of what? And who made up the other part of "us"? Meg knew it must be some man whom she knew, some man who often came here to the house and behaved as though he was her father's friend when he wasn't, when he didn't care about how deeply he betrayed a friendship. And her father

was so guileless that he didn't guess what was taking place beneath his roof. He couldn't or he wouldn't be so undisturbed. He'd have to show some sign of anger and create a scene and start suing for divorce. Then there wouldn't be this home on Cushing Street. Meg felt sick and cold.

But at last she had got the letter back without seeing any more of it. Only with it in her mind, how was she going to act towards anyone in this whole household? Somehow she had found her way upstairs and was sitting in her father's study staring down at a blank pad.

Then suddenly she had begun to write.

If people wanted plain bare facts, she'd give them plain bare facts. Her mother needn't think she was the only one to spoil things and to make them ugly. Meg felt that she could spoil things too. She could spoil the loveliest place she'd ever known if she set out to do it as she'd seen it the last time. And not a soul would guess what she had meant.

For an auctioneer's red flag was common and was ugly—wasn't it?—when it had been hung on a big entrance post that led to the private grandeurs that had once been Hillwood. So were urns with the paint peeling off and blistered. So too were the forbidding gates that sagged from rusty hinges and were propped back to let in a careless crowd that trampled down the lawn. And she could destroy the memories of the little gatehouse that once she and Gid had wanted so to live in. At the last, there had been old, yellow newspapers stuck into broken panes of glass and there had been rusty drain pipes and little, fallow, seedy clumps of grass sprouting from the cracks of the slate roof. On the goldfish pond had been a coating of green scum, and on the terrace, a litter of brown, very finely crumbled leaves. There was even more that she could write about the house inside.

Not, though, about the room of Cousin Will where for the first time in her life she had been treated as a separate person. That she had hurried by without a glance beyond the one that saw that all the shelves were emptied and the precious books stacked up in piles except where they had gone sprawling on the floor. "Luckily you're much too young to hate." Wasn't that what Cousin Will had told her when she had blundered in on him

for the first time? Too young to hate. Gid had never been too young. There had never been a time when he could bear his father. Yet what she felt this moment was her adoration for her mother. Only that the adoration had been damaged. It eased the hurt if she kept writing on and on.

She could remember her dismay when she had seen the drawing room at Hillwood. The gilt had turned a sallow green where it was tarnished and the amber velvet curtains, bundled carelessly in heaps, had shown pale sun streaks. Below the grimy cornices, the mirrors had been flecked with motes. And way up in one dusty corner where the satin paper had peeled off the wall, there had been a wet, brown stain that kept bubbling up and pulsing as the water had slowly seeped down from a broken cistern on the floor above.

"There," she said at last, as she showed what she had written to her father. "That ought to show I'm not so very proud about my family."

She watched him reading it and then re-reading it.

"So 'the splendor falls from castle walls,'" he said. "This hurts. I must suppose you meant it to."

Meg nodded.

"Was it because of anything I chanced to say to you?"

"No," she said. "I don't suppose that Hillwood was so very beautiful, but I liked to think so. I wish I'd never seen it damaged. I wish I didn't know that that's the way things get."

CHAPTER XIII

Class Day at Brown had happened long ago. The summer had slid by and it was now mid-August. Already the salt marshes had a tinge of orange. Box gentian was in bloom. If Meg went by the Swamp Road, she could be sure to find a clump of it, its flowers a neat, clean slaty blue that made the clusters of white turtle head look dingy. But it and the tall spikes of cardinal flower and the ferns that had turned frail and tarnished, all meant that in a

little while she would be leaving Little Compton and going back to town.

And she didn't want to go. She wanted to go on this way without anybody very near; not near enough for her to have to think about. What she wanted more than anything was being by herself with no one's knowing where she was or caring what she did or thought or felt.

Of all people it was Mother who had thought of sending her alone to Little Compton. There were the surface reasons for it that Mother had given to the family and there were the deeper, more important reasons that she'd given to Meg.

Way back in June she had announced her plan.

"Meg needs salt air," she'd said quite casually. "I could take her down to Gloucester with me, but there's nothing for her at the Pilgrim House. It's just the place for Whitman. He's off sketching all day long while I am busy tutoring. But Meg only mopes about and worries."

That was true. When her mother went off giving private lessons up and down the whole North Shore, Meg even hated all the names of the places that her mother had to go to; Magnolia and Beverley Farms and more than any other name, Pride's Crossing. They made her think of coachmen who knew they could be late because they only had to meet a tutor; of luncheons on a tray, not at a table with a hostess, of great rich houses with bright awnings and vast porches where a teacher mightn't be a servant but was surely not a guest. And Meg hated seeing her mother get off the trolley car at night often too tired to talk and a little wilted by the heat. She didn't want to know what a dreadful grind it was to store up money for a daughter's college education. She didn't want a college education or anything at all if she had to take it from her mother.

"Meg needs salt air," her mother had repeated, "but she's too old now to be dumped down in a cheap boardinghouse with no one to look after her."

"She could come with me," her father had said. He was off earning extra money too. He had been asked to botanize Block Island for the Government. "Meg could help me scour my sea-girt isle. We'd have great times."

But her mother wouldn't hear about Block Island. No, the thing to do was to send Meg down to Little Compton where everybody knew her and where she'd be with all the boys and girls she had grown up with. Down there, there wasn't any serious trouble that she could get into if she stayed at the Seaburys' boardinghouse and had Cousin Cora Simmons right under the same roof.

What her mother had said to Meg had been quite different. She had waited till they were alone.

"I don't know what the trouble is," she had started very quietly. "And I don't believe you'd better try to tell me."

That meant that she had noticed how Meg had begun to dodge her parties, and how Meg had stopped calling any of the Brown professors "Uncle," and how she managed to shy off and never to shake hands with any of the men who came to call.

"Words have a way of leaving horrid scars," her mother had said. "And usually it's much wiser to avoid them. But if I don't take you with me, it's not because I wouldn't love to have you. It's because I think right now you're better off away from me. If you get away from all of us, you can do some growing up alone."

Grandma, who was staying home with Grandpa and who had Bridget to look after them, thought it was the oddest notion to pack a young one off all by herself.

But Meg knew her mother had been right. She loved it living this way at the Seaburys' boardinghouse. The little sloping room out in the ell was hers. When she woke up at dawn and saw the cotton netting sagging with great drops of fog, she could get up and dress and go right out, taking the long way through the huckleberry pastures till she reached the beach at Warren's Point. She could sit above the tide and keep so still that the sea birds never noticed her. Flashing by, they cut the air with thin, curved wings. Quickly dodging each white fringe of wave the sandpipers skittered by with their small bodies teetering. She could wait till the thin layers of mist had lifted from the sea and wedge her way back home through one of the bumpy little lanes that the cows had made through clethra and high button-ball. If she took the way along the edge of a still pool where the pond lilies were dark pointed buds, she could sometimes reach a few and take

them home and make them open in the sunlight. There wasn't anyone to mind their floating in the wash bowl or to mind the sand that she tracked in or her dripping clothes hung up to dry or the row of shells and lucky stones that she kept on the window sill.

Cousin Cora Simmons might be staying under the same roof, but at least she never came out to Meg's room. Mostly looking large and neat and handsome, and concerned with smoothing down her skirts, she ruled the porch and talked a lot to other ladies about what she called "good style" and "people in society." There were certain special ones that she kept track of in the *Providence Journal*; and she was so busy with them that she seldom asked Meg questions that she had to dodge.

Those about her clothes stopped soon enough. "Your mother makes them, doesn't she?" Cousin Cora would say as she looked Meg up and down with pale blue shallow eyes. She made it clear that she had no interest in home-made dimities or ginghams or piqués."

But she did want to know about the Baileys who, it seemed, were "in society." What was going to happen to them now through Great-uncle William's business failure? How had they kept things going till he'd died? And when they came out of mourning, would they keep on being asked? Was it true that even selling Hillwood wouldn't leave much money? And how would the Charley Baileys like it renting and not owning? And if they were to be next door on Cushing Street, how did Meg think her mother would take it, having them so close?

Cousin Cora didn't have much patience with a person who kept on saying "I don't know."

"At least," she'd say, "you've got some idea about your mother. Think she'll ever marry over? She still has attention, hasn't she?"

She meant, Meg knew, that Father was so old that he'd be sure to die while Mother was still young. Cousin Cora meant a lot of things it hurt to think about. If she got no answer, she started on another tack.

"Think your Mother likes it having to earn money to support the family?"

"Father can. He does," Meg would insist. "It's only that Mother wants a lot of things for me and Whitman."

"Maybe you could marry young." Cousin Cora's pale blue eyes would grow observant. "You might marry young. That's what your mother did."

The words sounded as though there had never been a question of Mother's waiting till she fell in love.

And right now it was important to feel that at some time anyhow she and Father had been so much in love that they hadn't minded facing poverty or the difference in their ages or the cost of having children.

"If you married young and if you married well enough," Cousin Cora would conclude, "your mother could stop work."

Most of the time, Meg didn't have to think about this. The boys down on the beach didn't have much time for girls. They were too busy trying dives from the high springboard and swimming in on a big wave and stretching out and drying off before they started over. The highest praise Meg got was because she was the only girl who didn't use a breast stroke and dared to peel her stockings off and dive and swim way out beyond the surf.

But now Gid Codman had turned up and was visiting the Saunderses. Mostly she saw him in a crowd, but in the afternoons he did come after her to go on walks and look for marsh plants or to hunt out the ruins of old houses near the Commons or even to search through the old burial ground where the worn slate stones were mottled with bright orange lichen. Gid's grandmother had come from Little Compton too.

"Think you'll ever marry him?" Cousin Cora was asking at the moment. "Think this will ever come to anything?"

"There isn't anything to come to anything," Meg said. "We've just always known each other."

"But your mother wouldn't have to teach. She couldn't if you married in the Codman family."

Suddenly Meg saw her mother with her head up fighting any odds there were and disdaining help from anybody.

"There's no one in the world," the protest came out fiercely, "who'd dare to try to make my mother stop."

But if Cousin Cora only wouldn't talk this way of Gid. To

Meg, it didn't have a thing to do with the way they felt about each other. At dances, other boys sometimes got "mushy" if they had the chance. But never Gid. Nobody wanted less to kiss her. He'd never had the least desire to kiss her. That she knew.

Yet Cousin Cora spoiled things enough to make her dodge the risk of meeting him in front of everyone. Now that Meg had left the Seaburys, she had dawdled all along the way till everyone had been in bathing. The boys and girls were heading for the bathhouses; and if she went in for a swim, she'd have to go alone.

It was more fun to sit here on this rise of dunes where she and Gid liked best to sit when they were on the beach together. Behind her, the sand lay white and loose and fine, sometimes rising with the wind and sifting through the air and settling lightly. Before her, it sloped down like a slab of slippery wet marble and between two reddish sandstone cliffs, the ocean surged in dangerously. Each wave had a different sort of threat; and even though it was low tide, one would come creaming over a high shoulder and streaming down into a basin that it filled with suds. The very gentlest lifted up the clinging strands of seaweed, floated them a moment, dragged them back, and left them dark and dripping till the next wave came. In the scoop between the cliffs, the tug of a strong undertow kept dragging out the pebbles that rolled in again with the next churn of foam.

Suddenly Meg saw Gid scrambling up the ledges to the highest peak of rock. He was surefooted, but he had no business out there. Everybody knew that a great surge sometimes gathered and swept over. Everybody knew the risk of what could happen.

Before she knew it, she had screamed.

There hadn't been a surge. If there had, she would have seen it; and it would at least have left a spatter from the flying spray. The rock where Gid had stood was lying out there hot and dry as a bleached bone. For an instant, she had seen him standing very straight. Then he had raised his hands for a high dive, curved his body quickly and dropped out of sight.

And where he'd dropped, there wasn't any depth of water for a dive. There was only a wild swirl with crests of waves that lashed each other crosswise above a reef of jagged rocks.

A man had heard her scream and was running out to where a coil of rope was fixed on a high stanchion. Three men way down the beach were wading through the waves and launching a small dory. But even if Gid wanted to be saved, they'd never be in time. What was happening out beyond that cliff, she didn't want to think about. She couldn't stir.

"He's used his head all right," someone called out as he sped by. "He's swimming out to sea, by God. If he gets past the reefs, he's got a chance. He may have strength enough to make it."

"Once he'd been washed off, he used his head all right," somebody else called back.

But there hadn't been a wave to wash Gid off.

When Meg looked up, people near to her were pointing. She had to look where they were pointing; and way, way out she could see a head that rose and disappeared, and rose and disappeared, and a hand that kept on lifting slowly. It must be Gid. He had turned towards shore although he wasn't gaining. He didn't need to gain. If he could only keep afloat the dory'd reach him. It was pitching over the long swells. It was pointing towards him and the space between was lessening. Out flashed an oar. He'd grasped it and was hanging on. He was being lifted in across the gunwales. Slowly the boat was swinging in and heading towards the beach.

Meg had scrambled to her feet and left. She was racing up the white, hot, sandy road that went curving through the clumps of bayberry and ran past the shingled summer cottages. From behind her came the fishhawks' gliding cries, but ahead were open fields where only one roof showed, that and the long sloping shoulder of a barn. If she took the field off to the left, nobody would see her. Not in that rustling aisle of corn where the green, three-cornered pennants towered above her head. The earth was tilled and soft beneath her feet. Without a swerve the furrow ran and stopped now that she had reached a fringe of bracken. Beyond there was an orchard filled with dumpy little apple trees. It was entirely hidden from the road. Here she could be alone and think.

When they met, what was she going to say to Gid? Should she pretend she hadn't seen and didn't know? She could. Didn't she pretend at home? Wasn't that what she was always doing?

Only at home she had done it ever since she could remember;

surely since that day when she had heard her mother say that she had had to be cooped up with her and scarlet fever. Maybe when she'd been small, she had shown that she had hated certain things. She'd been rude to Dr. Vaughan when he'd been calling on her mother. She had scowled about the kindergarten in the parlor and at almost all the children who had acted as though they owned her house. But since then hadn't she behaved as though every girl she knew, shared her mother's bedroom? Had she ever let her father guess that she felt that he was lonely in his rooms on the third floor? Or that she knew he longed to be the only one who brought in money? Or that he seemed so solitary when he started off at night to make a public speech, or when he dressed in what he called his togs and went off by himself to dine with friends? Year after year hadn't she made believe that she liked the men who came to call? Hadn't she been polite to them and let them give her presents? True, she didn't call them "Uncle" any more. But her mother thought that was because she was disturbed by growing up and wanting to be formal. Her mother didn't know that she had seen that dreadful letter in the desk.

But with Gid, Meg had never made believe. Not ever once. Not over anything. He had asked her questions sometimes that she wouldn't answer. Still, those had had to do with other people. When things had had to do with just himself and her, she had blurted out the truth.

Then if she didn't do it now, there was something that she'd change and spoil forever. She wasn't going to spoil it, not if she could help it. Step by step, she was going from the orchard to the open road, but she was terribly afraid.

Now that she had passed the barn, the farmhouse under the three elms looked clean and big and still. The space between the elms led back to peace and coolness. It led to friendliness where she could beg a glass of milk. She could sit down and drink it in the airy kitchen.

But suddenly Gid barred the way.

And it wasn't her imagination. His head was up, alert. He had been looking for her. His eyes, so queerly light in his tanned face, were sharp. They were asking her a question that they meant to know the answer to.

"You didn't even care enough to stay," he said. "You got right up and left before they brought me to the beach."

"Before I left," Meg said, "I knew that you were safe."

But somehow she had to get across the great lonely open space there was between them.

"Gid," she blurted out. "I saw you dive. I knew you meant to do it."

A slow, hot coppery flush was rising under his tanned skin.

"I thought that everybody thought it was an accident," he said.

"I guess that everybody did but me," she said. "I was the one who screamed."

Somehow after that, they were sitting with their backs against the great shaft of a buttonwood that went soaring up above them with crooked white branches. And between them was a silence that was terrible until at last the words came stumbling out.

"I didn't know I wanted to," Gid said. "Lots of times when I've been mad, I've thought about it. It seemed one way of getting even. But I didn't know I really wanted to, till I was standing on that cliff."

"What made you want to, then?" Meg asked.

"You would have too," he said, "if you'd ever seen your mind. I mean the way it looks inside. I did see the way it looked. You needn't think I didn't."

"You couldn't truly see it, Gid."

She had only made him angry.

"I tell you that I did." His voice dared her to deny it. "If you don't believe me, then I'll tell you how it looked. It was all in pieces and each piece was lined with pulp. They were sticky red and dripped. I didn't want to touch them, but I would have had to touch them if I hadn't jumped."

When Meg closed her eyes, the words he said got even worse. She kept staring straight ahead at patches of sweet fern and tangles of green catbriar. There was a single bush of barberry that she couldn't bear to glance at because its berries were deep crimson.

"But you swam," she said at last triumphantly. "You struck the water and you swam. Men have been drowned there on that beach. You're the only one who thought of swimming out to sea. You thought fast, Gid. You did."

He was breathing much more quietly, but,
"That isn't all of it," he said. "There's more."

Nothing could be worse than what he'd told her, yet if it was, she had to stand it. Now that he saw that she was going to listen, he was going on.

"I thought I was all clean of it," he said. "I thought the sea had washed it all away. It hasn't."

"What makes you think it hasn't?"

"Because it still shows in my eyes," he said. "As soon as I could get away, I went to my own room to look. I looked in the mirror and it shows. It still shows in my eyes. Anyone could tell my eyes were scared of things they'd had to stare at."

"Gid." Meg spoke so sharply that he turned and faced her.

"It doesn't show," she said, although it did. The black pupils were just pinpoints; and it wasn't merely that his gaze was troubled. She had often seen it troubled. Now it was terrified as though what he'd seen, he was still seeing.

"If it showed at all," she asked, "you don't suppose I would . . . ?"

"Would what?" he interrupted.

"Be doing this." Leaning towards him, she had put her arms around his shoulders and had kissed him on both eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

Gid had made Meg dreadfully ashamed of what she'd done. Ever since that afternoon, he had shied away as though he didn't dare to be alone with her. And even if she had found him by himself, how could she have told him why she had acted in a way she didn't understand herself?

She had been glad when he'd left Little Compton and she'd no longer had to deal with Cousin Cora's curiosity about the sudden break in what had been a daily close companionship. But purposely Meg had dodged the beach at Warren's Point and the walk up to the Commons and all the places where she and Gid had been together.

This road ahead was one that she had never taken. It was rough walking underfoot because of the great cobblestones that had been pounded in upon each other by the winter storms. At her left, was a salt pond, intensely blue wherever she could see its surface gleaming through the cat-tails and tall sedges. At her right, there was a broken line of cliffs, sometimes dropping sheer to where the surf was breaking on the shelving reefs, sometimes worn to the level of the sea and lying as a mass of tumbled rocks which were dark with barnacles and seaweed. Before her, grounded on the topmost ledge where white ridge on ridge sloped up to a high peak, stood a big, arklike house, painted a deep red that somehow made it seem more gaunt, and having a steep roof and pointed gables that cut harsh angles in the sky.

This was the nearest that Meg had ever been to it, but she knew well whose it was. Years ago when she'd come down on the boat from Providence and had passed through the drawbridge at Tiverton, all the children had crowded to the bow to feel the pitch of the first ocean swell. Then came the moment when one of them was the very first to shout, "I can see old Dr. Bogert's house," and another one was quick to answer, "It's cellar was blown out of solid rock."

Certainly when seen this close, it looked as though it was; and considering who owned it, it seemed right for it to be so.

Nobody else, not even in the whole of Providence, was quite so terrifying. Even Grandma Simmons thought so. It was for him that she had held the bowl of scalding water while he'd probed to find the bullet that Great-uncle Seabury had brought home from Manassas. She still liked to tell about how she hadn't flinched. And Dr. Bogert was the one, Meg knew, who had brought her herself into the world. Her mother had sent Father off to fetch him and had been simply furious when she had found he'd come back in the buggy with the doctor, adding weight and holding back the horse. All the same her mother hadn't dared to scold till everything was over and old Dr. Bogert had gone on his way. Especially he liked to show his independence of grand people. Once at the Russells', of all places, he had rung the bell and found that the butler didn't answer quickly enough to suit him. He'd departed quickly in a temper and no amount of wheedling was enough to bring him back.

It was queer to sit here at the roadside staring at his house and thinking over all the things she knew about him. Not as the person who took care of her when she was really sick. Then she only felt a sense of great importance in having him and not "young" Dr. Bogert whom his father liked to send. In her mind remained a picture of a thickset, handsome, white-haired man who had made the room seem small and had made her feel much smaller. He had strong, white hair, a bald high forehead, cold blue eyes and somewhat heavy features. And he wore a ruffled, very red carnation in the lapel of his dark suit and had the neatest cuffs and plaited shirt fronts. In he came with the clean smell of drugs and in a short while out he went.

But the important thing he left behind was the sense of being the right person for the stories told about him. Meg knew her father had been young when he had gone off to the Civil War, but old Dr. Bogert had been younger. At no age at all, he had helped to cut off arms and legs on battlefields, doing it by lamplight or by torchlight with any sort of instrument that offered. That was how he'd known he'd wanted dreadfully to be a surgeon and had been allowed to come back home and go to Harvard Medical, learning what he could between times and returning to the front to put his knowledge into use.

What else did she know about him? That he didn't drink. He gambled. And not in the usual way that members of the Hope Club played for stakes. As soon as he had finished with a ticklish operation, he went straight off to the West Side of town to Canfield's gambling house. There he played a game called "faro" that they said he played against stacked cards. What's more he won and sometimes came away with more than he could earn by surgery. Sometimes he won a fortune in one night. It was one of these he'd used to blow the cellar out of solid rock.

People seemed to understand his gambling out at Canfield's. They were forever saying that it eased the strain. What they couldn't seem to understand was his building was off here away from everyone. They meant away from other houses. But here on this bleak point, there weren't even trees. The bayberry was blistered by salt scud; and what small beach plums there were, were dwarfed and twisted double by the drive of a terrific gale.

Yet Meg felt that she could understand his choosing this one

site above all others. Not that it would do for her. There would be too much of the wild elements that her mother said she loved to be mixed up with. But for once she'd like to hear the keen shrill whistle of the wind as it souged around the chimneys and the eaves and raced past the broad windows. For once she would like to stand on the high porch and stare off at the sweep of sea that dwindled the high cliffs and stretched in stripes of purplish green that thinned to misty blue as they faded off to the horizon.

Suddenly she thought about a game that she and Gid had used to play when they saw a house that stirred their curiosity.

"They can't ever turn you out, not if you ask them for a drink of water," Gid had said. "That's all you need to do because they've got to be that Christian. While you're drinking, you can get a chance to look around inside."

It was years since she had used that pretext which had almost always worked, but before she knew what she was doing, Meg had scaled the bone-white ledges and was going up the heavy concrete steps to the front door.

"If you'll only sit right down and talk," a woman's voice was calling to her. "Then maybe I won't hear the ocean for a spell. You put your chair right close to me."

At the same moment, Meg's eyes were startled by the outspread view that seemed to have no limits. From high overhead, the clouds went racing out to sea, casting shadows that sped with them clear across the stretches of unbroken water and vanishing in space.

"Why," Meg managed to gasp out against the wind that took her breath, "why, you can see the whole of the Atlantic."

"Do you want to see it?" the woman's voice was saying. "Every day I come out on this porch and face my rocker back to the ocean. That's the way I sit till my husband comes from town at night." She paused before she added, "Oftener than likely, he don't come."

She was not quite like anyone whom Meg had ever talked to. Even here on this bleak porch she seemed a little like an actress in a grown-up play. She had eyebrows that were absolutely perfect arches, and flashing eyes, and a mouth shaped like a crimson quiver. Yes, and she had thick brown hair that was piled up in careful terraces and bright high color and a full figure that went

in and out in generous curves. But she spoke like country people in the Valley.

"I suppose you think," she said, "that I could stand to hear the ocean. My husband thinks I ought to. He's always saying that I grew up in a racket. Maybe I did, but at least it was a racket with some sense to it. It didn't just go sloshing round the way the sea does. When mill looms start to whirring, they get something done."

"I know," Meg said, "I like to hear them too."

She was thinking of the Valley, not of Providence where her life was all bound up with College. She knew almost every mill from Natic clear to Phenix and had been inside of them when she had been off visiting. Especially she knew the Jastrum Mill at Adamsville where she often went with Mildred Jastrum. They loved to step inside the great, vibrating rooms and feel their hearts go pounding with the loud, fast beat of the machinery until the moment came when they couldn't stand it any longer and made for the quick, startling quiet of the world outside.

Mrs. Bogert had seized on her remark. She was asking Meg all kinds of questions. Who had the neatest village? Who had the best-kept tenements? Which mill owner was the hardest on his help? Which was willing to let in a lot of foreign immigrants? They were all questions which Meg had never thought about and she was glad when Mrs. Bogert broke off suddenly as a man came out the door and was walking towards them on the porch.

It must be "young" Dr. Bogert, though he didn't look so very young. In some ways he did resemble the old doctor, but he had a kind of air of knowing that he was fine looking. Somehow, Meg felt, he made her think about the Kinston County Fair where a special kind of bright blue ribbon was given to a horse or bull or any sort of creature that knew how to take a stance and show self-pride.

He had come over to her chair and was holding out his hand most formally.

"I'm glad," he said, "to meet the swimmer. You're the girl who doesn't use a breast stroke and who doesn't care for stockings. You don't care who sees you, do you?"

"I never thought of anybody's noticing." Meg could feel a

blush come as he made her feel that he had noticed. He was amused and he was smiling at her, but there was a sort of estimation of her in his eyes.

"And you're the girl," he was continuing, "who likes to scour the beaches by herself. I've often wondered what you found that you preferred to company."

"I find lots of things," Meg said. She was speaking hastily because she was embarrassed. "My father is Professor Bailey and he's trained me just a little about plants and shells and seaweed."

"Seaweed and shells and plants." When he spoke, he made the words sound silly. "You look alive enough to search for something with some life to it."

"Mostly," she added quickly, "I find a place where I sit still and watch the birds."

"Birds?" he asked. This time he didn't seem so condescending. "Mother," he added as he turned to Mrs. Bogert, who had been rocking silently. "Suppose, since this young lady's interested in birds, I show her my collection?"

"Do anything you like," she answered. "You'll do it anyhow. But I'm not coming in with you."

On Meg's hand she laid a hand that wore a broad gold wedding ring and that also wore what Cousin Cora Simmons liked to call "a handsome diamond."

"You come back and talk to me some day when everyone's away," she said.

In a minute Meg was standing in a big, high-ceilinged room that was faced and trimmed with light, shiny polished maple. It had a big stuffed sofa and stuffed armchairs that were covered with a topaz-colored velvet. One side of the room was taken up by a huge fireplace and a chimney built of cobblestones that reached up to the ceiling. Above the mantelpiece was a black bison's head. Though its coarse hair was worn away in a white patch above one temple, it had the fiercest look of indignation. Even the dull, broad, stupid forehead didn't take away the scorn that curled around the flaring, open nostrils.

"Young" Dr. Bogert saw her staring at it.

"He's a beauty, isn't he? My father brought him down out on the prairies," he remarked with pride.

But it was his collection of stuffed birds that he wanted Meg to see. Each room on the ground floor held some of them in heavy cabinets that had rounding fronts of glass.

Meg was naming those she knew. The killdeers, dove gray with circlets of black velvet. She knew the meadows where they nested in the marsh grass and from which they soared to race across the sky and scream their wild cries overhead. The terns she loved for their thin crescent wings that cut the air like sickles as they flew against the gale. And she loved the little snipes and sandpipers for their quick ways, and especially the Carolina rail. The last one she had seen, she had found in Quicksand Pond. It had been scuttling eagerly about its business in the sedges with its white tail bobbing.

"If birds only knew enough," Meg said, "to slack their speed. Birds that go slowly don't get shot. It's just the swift ones."

That was the wrong thing to say. It was the stupid thing to say. "Young" Dr. Bogert's voice had changed.

"There's not much sportsmanship," he said, "in bringing down an easy mark."

Meg looked around the room before she spoke.

"I wouldn't be a sportsman," she said firmly, "not for anything."

"Neither would you slack your speed for anything or anyone," he said. "Remember that I've seen you diving."

Again he had made her feel uncomfortable.

"I guess I've got to start back home," she told him suddenly and headed for the door.

But once that he had learned that "home" meant staying at the Seaburys' and having to walk back by the shore road, he announced that he was going to drive her. And he was so quick and curt about his order that he made it seem exactly like an order of his father's; one that she couldn't dream of disobeying. By the time that she had said good-bye to Mrs. Bogert, a high, black, glossy dog-cart with pale lemon-yellow wheels was standing in the drive.

"I'm afraid you'll have to scramble up alone," "young" Dr. Bogert called from way above her head. "This horse won't stand. None of my father's will unless they're chained and bolted to a

hitching-post. Ever seen his buggy coming round the corner on two wheels? You have. I thought so."

Then as she reached the seat beside him and he let the horse spurt off with a great spin of wheels and scattering of gravel, he went on:

"My father never buys a horse until he's made quite sure it likes to run away."

Certainly that must be the reason why he'd bought this mare. Her ears were laid flat back as she tore down the road that circled the salt pond. As Meg braced her feet and clung, she had the feeling that only the deep ruts were holding the high dog-cart to its course. Once, however, that they'd reached the highway, "young" Dr. Bogert spoke.

"You'd better hang on tight. I mean to let her feel her oats. I'll show you speed."

With a long, brightly varnished whip, he barely touched a chestnut-colored rump and they were racing past a landscape that Meg couldn't see. It was blurred at first by summer cottages and with one flash of the bright gold cupola that topped the Bundys' boardinghouse. Then there was the sudden gloom that she knew must be the pines in front of Mr. Richmond's house, then the quick flicker of great water-willows and the stretch of open pastures.

"I'm not going clear up to the Commons," she managed to gasp out.

He didn't answer, but at last she could see that his strong thick hands were tightening on the reins and that his arms were taut as the carriage slewed around the corner. In a second he had brought the mare up sharp and she was in the Seaburys' clam-shell drive.

And there was Cousin Cora Simmons sitting on the porch and watching.

"You can jump down now," Meg heard Dr. Bogert saying to her. "Only before you do, I'd like to know when I'm to get my thanks. Suppose you do your best high dive for me. I'll come out on the rocks next Saturday round noontime."

"I couldn't dive at all," Meg said. "Not if I knew that you were watching me."

"Couldn't you?" His eyes were staring at her hard and he was smiling. "I don't suppose you even know that that's a compliment."

"It's not a compliment," she said. She had climbed down and was speaking from the lawn. "I only dive for fun. Besides," she added firmly, "next week I'm going back to Providence. I'm going back for good."

"Next summer then. That's even better. It gives you a whole year to grow in."

He had barely time to say this before the mare had reached the limits of her patience and was speeding off.

As Meg reached the porch, Cousin Cora's eyes were on her disapprovingly.

"If," Cousin Cora said, "you're going to rattle round in dog-carts with Linc Bogert, it's high time I wrote your mother."

"I'm not going to rattle round in dog-carts," Meg protested. "I don't want to ride in one again with anybody."

"Well, when you do," came the retort, "you'd better let me choose your company."

But though Cousin Cora kept on prodding, Meg wasn't going to tell her of her visit to the Bogerts' house or how she'd happened to be driven back or how she'd felt, sitting by a man who'd made her conscious of his nearness. Gid had never made her feel like that.

CHAPTER XV

Cushing Street, when Meg got home, showed its own signs of early autumn. On every lawn except her own, were beds of scarlet salvia and in the garden out in the back yard, the chrysanthemums had made tight little buttons with hard centers that showed flecks of crimson, orange, and maroon.

At first, nobody noticed how Gid stayed away because so much was happening in the family.

The "Charlie Baileys" had moved into the old colonial house

next door. If they had come down in the world as everybody said, to Meg this didn't seem so. No couple, she felt, had come down in the world who dressed every night for dinner. And on an evening when they sent for her to come in for what they called a little chat, she had to change to her best dress. Then very formally she went up the high steps and rang the bell and asked the maid in uniform for Mrs. Bailey. Very formally she was conducted through the stiffest sort of conversation by Cousin Belle, who was the white-haired lady who had been standing on the terrace on the day of the first trip to Hillwood. Cousin Belle sorted out Meg's friends in a bewildering way. Sometimes, it seemed, that their fathers were in trade, or that they came from very simple backgrounds, or that they had moved from the West Side and were trying "to get in." This was a language quite as strange to Meg as any foreign tongue. She knew only that she wasn't going to change her friends and that she liked to see her cousin sitting very proudly in a low-cut dress and looking like one of the lovely ladies in the big engraving of Franklin at the Court of France. What would horrify this royal lady would be the slightest breach in manners. Not stupidity or prejudice or any of the things that horrified Meg's father. But she was so perfect in her way that Meg did her level best at living up to a new standard of behavior. When the little jeweled clock up on the mantelpiece chimed ten, she never said, "I can run home alone." She waited for her Cousin Charlie to lift his pink, round chin from the white prongs of his collar and to rise from his carved oak armchair with a creaking of his stiff, white evening shirt. Out in the hall, she stood while he put on his top hat and overcoat to escort her just to the next house.

At home, things were upset because Brown University was opening under a new President whom Father mimicked in the safety of the household.

"He says ya-as, ya-as," Father kept proclaiming. "Then the very minute that my back is turned, he does the opposite. What's a botany course to him? A snap course for a football squad. Bullocks, not men, are what I'm asked to teach, I tell you."

After each explosion, he went off to see one more trustee to get some backing for his work.

Grandma Simmons was so glad to have Meg home that one by one she tried to part with all her small possessions and was grieved when she was made to take them back.

But the person who had changed, changed dreadfully, was Mother. She had lost her easy careless laughter and she had stopped giving parties, even Sunday-evening "smokers" for the men on the Brown Faculty. She had no time for silliness, she said, now that she had settled down to write school textbooks. Professor Manly, who had left Brown for Chicago University, was going to lend his name to them because he had a reputation as an English scholar; a reputation that carried weight in the educational world. But because Mother knew the teaching end she was to do the actual spade work till it came to the revising. Meg could remember how her father had said, so long ago, "You run a school. I didn't know you ever went to one." How far her mother had forged ahead since then. Now she was to write a Speller that would win State contracts in the West and bring in a raft of money by being the best Speller that there was.

For the purpose, she had bought the most enormous business desk and had had it put right in her bedroom where it took up half the wall. The Manly-Bailey desk, Father called it lightly. But he had, Meg knew, a wistful feeling that was deeper than his jesting. While Mother slaved, he had a way of stealing in with passages in books that he had marked for her. Earnestly he hoped she could make use of them. They were the only contribution he could offer; and he wanted so to play some part and have some share in Mother's drudgery that cut her off night after night.

It was hard for Meg to learn to go to sleep in the bright lamp-light and she often lay in bed and looked and wondered. There her mother was. She hadn't run off and left. In one way and another, she was looking after everybody in her household. But how very far removed she sometimes seemed.

Strangest of all, now Meg was home, was to find Grandfather put into her brother's narrow little room. There he often sat by the one window, darning his own underclothes with tiny, careful stitches. And still hanging on the wall was Whitman's huge framed picture of a Brown football eleven. It had been left

there; and the men with their jaws fiercely set were scowling down at Grandfather in a threatening, pouncing crouch.

Nobody had written Meg that Whitman had stopped school, but he was at Howard Pyle's in Wilmington and learning how to draw. He was going to be an illustrator like the great Howard Pyle himself and do pictures for the stories that came out in *Century* or *Scribner's*. Some day everybody'd see, so Mother said, that the very last thing that he needed was a college education. When a person had real talent, a college education only held him back.

Mother didn't mean to hurt. She spoke thoughtlessly because she did miss Whitman dreadfully. She missed his easy, careless talk and the tunes he strummed on the piano and his noisy crowd of boys and the scrapes that they kept getting into. "Meg," she said to someone, "Meg, I never have to worry over. She just plugs along."

School had already opened and in a special room that was labelled "College Preparation," Meg was plugging. So hard that when Martie or Mildred or Virginia, who were in the General Course, did find a chance to sneak inside and chalk big hearts and boys' initials on the blackboard, she sometimes never even noticed. But at home she longed to be a problem that took time to understand.

Except when it came to Gid. For the first time last week her father had asked, "Where's Gid?"

"I hope Meg's had the sense to give him a sound cuffing. It's what he's needed all his lifetime." Grandmother had answered quickly. Suppose she knew what Meg had really done?

Father was not to be put off. "When he comes again," he said, "be sure to send him up to me. I'd like to show him my Block Island plants. He's never had a look at them."

That was a compliment that Father never paid except to a trained scientist. If it hadn't been for what she'd done, Meg knew that Gid would be quick to seize the opportunity. But,

"He isn't interested in plants, not any longer," she'd explained.

"If I know the boy at all," her father'd said, "he's not the sort to drop old loyalties."

But he was. He'd shown he was. None of the things that he

and Meg had done together mattered to him. Maybe they never had. Maybe he'd only done them with her at odd times when all his other friends were busy. Maybe he'd never cared for her at all.

That was one reason why she was so glad that Mildred Jastrum wanted her to come for over Sunday out at Adamsville. She would have to think of someone else but Gid. Besides, this was the time of year when she loved best to go out to the Valley.

High in the cold blue air, the hillsides would be flaming scarlet. A white mist would hang above the flow of the Pawtuxet River, and the woodbine on the mill that stood beside the milldam would be ruby red. Inside the high grilled gate, the lawns about the Adams Homestead would be strewn with drifts of leaves that fell too fast to be raked up for long. And at the edges of the gravel drive, little smouldering bonfires would be sending up thin twists of smoke.

But best of all, in October, autumn came inside the house. The moment that she stepped inside the Jastrums' broad, white-panelled hall, she would see the parlor flooded by a deep, rich orange glow cast by a sassafras that grew close to the south windows. The glow would deepen the big bowls of marigolds on the mahogany tables and mellow the white woodwork. Even the open fire would look much snuggier than it did in other houses, and the claret-colored armchairs near it would seem deeper and more velvety. The Jastrums, too, would be, if anything, much ruddier and heartier. They'd make dinner more important and they would laugh and talk more as they lingered after the dessert, munching raisins and cracking walnuts for each other or pouring out another glass of muscatel to take the nip off the fall evening. And all the while, they'd carry on a long warm gossip that asked questions of her too.

It was fun to think about them while she was busy packing. No matter what turned up in all their steady flow of talk, it would be different from a dinner here at home. She wouldn't have to think of anyone's hurt feelings. But now that she was choosing what to take, there was the awful problem of a dress to change to in the evenings.

"I can't go," Meg burst out suddenly. "I've got to stay at home. I haven't anything to wear."

"Your blue cashmere's clean." As her mother spoke, she took it from the closet and began to lay it flat and fold it.

"I'm tired of looking only clean," Meg said. "That's all that anybody ever says about me."

Why couldn't her mother understand that cleanness didn't matter?

"I want a dress," Meg added, "that doesn't tug across the front."

"That doesn't tug across the front," her mother said. "You didn't use to be so silly and self-conscious. It's just since you've got back from Little Compton. I suppose I never should have sent you there alone. I suppose you met some horrid boy who said things."

Meg thought quickly of the way she'd felt when "young" Dr. Bogert had looked at her and talked about her diving.

"No, I didn't meet some horrid boy," she said.

"But now you're always hitching up your dresses from the belt and blousing them in front. Mildred doesn't do that, does she?"

"Mildred's clothes don't pull and bind," Meg said. She'd been rude again. Her mother's tone of voice showed her hurt feelings and that she was thinking of the hours she spent in sewing for a daughter who didn't want to wear the clothes it took so long to make for her.

"I think my cashmere is a lovely dress," Meg started.

"I'll be thankful," Mother said, "when you can make things for yourself."

When she spoke in that grieved voice, there wasn't any use in trying to say more. The only thing for Meg to do was to strap up her bag and prove she liked her dress by taking it to wear out at the Jastrums'. Her mother was so grieved that she couldn't even manage a good-bye.

Before Meg left, she had to go upstairs to say a word to her father, who put down his work and wheeled his swivel chair until he faced her.

"While you're out with Mildred, try to see your Cousin Julia," he began. "She'll show you what's splendiferous. She'll show you scarlet and fine raiment on her hillsides. I don't know anyone who's richer in estate."

That meant that he was criticizing, too; and that he liked Cousin Julia's simple way of living better than he liked the Jastrums'. But what he truly wanted was for Meg to stay a little girl who went to walk with him and picked up autumn leaves with him and brought them home to press in some big book up in his study.

"I can't always stay a little girl," she said.

"No," he said. "I expect that I'd be sorry if you could. But now you're old enough to go off gathering rosebuds, cast an occasional eye at something less than the superbums. And remember if you don't that your old Daddy likes to hear about the hothouse blooms. He might even know enough to tell you which were worthy of your notice. You've never told me much about your finds at Little Compton."

"There weren't any hothouse blooms, not at the seashore."

Once or twice Meg had wanted dreadfully to tell him about Gid and to ask if she'd done something dreadful when she'd kissed him. But she had never felt the least desire to tell about her visit to the Bogerts' house. If "young" Dr. Bogert was a hothouse bloom, he was one she didn't want to talk about.

"At Little Compton, there were only lots of Simmonses," she said.

At once she saw that her father felt that he had blundered when he had asked her to confide in him. Shy was a queer word to use about his smile, but that was what it was as he sat looking at her. He was afraid to say another word for fear it might be wrong and make her never tell him anything.

"Have a good time," was all he said.

And at once he seemed so darling that she didn't want to go away to visit. If she stayed home, she could make up to him for the evenings when she knew that he wanted her to come upstairs and read with him instead of reading by herself. She could make up to him for the times when she had come only because she'd needed help with Vergil and with Homer. Or for the times when she had shied away from any subject that had started to get personal. He needn't know that she was scared for fear he'd tell her he was lonely, lonely and unhappy and that if he did, she couldn't bear it.

"Daddy," she began. "the very moment I get back, let's have a read. Let's go on with *Pendennis*."

Now he was really smiling.

"So you liked 'old Pen,'" he said. "We left him in his cups if I remember rightly. When you return, we'll have to get him sobered up. But before then, you may meet him in real life. You may find him out at Adamsville stuffing goose-livers. If you do, be sure to give him my regards and tell him that I have a weakness for his failings. Champagne and guinea hen . . . I wish your mother's budget could include them oftener among the cod-fish balls and the dried beef. But it's young Clive Newcomb whom I really hope you'll chance on. Don't let him be too old. It doesn't make for happy mating."

"Mating." That was a word to make Meg stiffen from anything she knew about it.

"I've got to catch my train," she said and quickly kissed him and went out the door.

CHAPTER XVI

When Meg reached the station, Mildred saw her first.

"Here I am," she called in a high voice across the waiting-room. She was talking to the ticket agent at the window and she had on the gray checked suit Meg envied because it had a tailor's label sewed on the silk lining. Though it was only early fall, Mildred wore a little squirrel toque on top of her brown pompadour and she was carrying a small black swagger stick and a patent-leather purse that had M.J. in square brass letters in one corner.

"You don't have to buy a ticket. You don't even have to have a pass," she said. "Not when you're with me."

Each time she made it seem her special train.

The moment they were sitting on a worn plush seat, she unclasped her purse and began to show Meg all the things there were inside. The littler they were, the better Mildred liked them, but they each had to be initialed; even the flat tiny, silver pencil.

"I won't have anything," she said, "that isn't marked M.J."

Even presents that I get from Tilden Thurber's. Unless they can be marked M. J., I take them right straight back and turn them in."

From Tilden Thurber's, Meg had had one present only and it was safely in her bureau in a little cardboard box. It was a small gold brooch, and her father, three years back had taken her into the store and let her choose it. All he'd said was that he'd like to have her choose one with a tiny pearl because her name was Margaret and because she was a woman now and not a little girl, and should be glad of it, not terrified. "Mother says all sorts of horrid things just start to happen," she had managed to blurt out to him. And he had stopped whatever he was doing and taken her down street to Tilden Thurber's. They had bought her brooch and then they'd gone to Gelb's and had ice cream and charlotte russe until it had turned into a real party.

"I think," Meg said out loud, "I think my father is the nicest person in the world."

"My father says," said Mildred, "that your father doesn't live in a real world. He says that half your father's charm is in not knowing anything about things."

"He does know about things," Meg protested.

"Not about money," Mildred said, "or mills."

For a little, Meg sat thinking of her father in his Doctor's academic gown of scarlet broadcloth. Once she used to be ashamed of it because it made him different and conspicuous. When the procession had come filing down the hill at Brown Commencement, and she had seen a flash of brilliant red among the gowns of sombre black, she had wanted dreadfully to leave the curb and run away before he passed. But even then she'd known that scarlet stood for high distinction. He couldn't wear it unless an English University had honored him; and it never would have honored him if he had been concerned with money and with mills.

Mildred's voice was racing on about the summer that was over.

"I wish we didn't have to go to Warwick and be swell," she uttered thoughtfully. "Not that I don't like sailing my own cat-boat. I won almost every race. But I'm sick to death of lawns that run into each other and of the same people moving down to the same houses summer after summer and forever doing the same formal thing at the same hour. I wish we went to Little Compton."

"I don't believe that you could stand the Seaburys' boarding-house," Meg said. For didn't Mildred love to talk of luncheon tables and what she called "the right appointments"? Meg couldn't see her sitting down to the same tablecloth that showed the same spots sometimes for three days. Nor could she think of Mildred as living in the little bedroom in the ell. "You're always saying," Meg went on, "that you have to have things dainty. The Seaburys' isn't dainty. I don't mind. I don't mind anything when I can have the ocean."

"You and your ocean," Mildred said. "Anybody'd think you owned it. But it hasn't got a thing to do with why I'd like to go to Little Compton. I'll tell you something if you'll promise not to tell on me. I'd like to be where I could get a chance to see Linc Bogert. You've never had him as a doctor, have you? Well, it's not at all the same as having the old doctor. You feel thrills up and down your spine. And you begin to think up brand new ways of feeling worse to make him come again. Of course headaches at our age are easiest. But at Little Compton I could go out on the rocks and get a sunstroke. Then he'd have to pay attention to me."

"You mean you'd go right out and get a sunstroke purposely?"

"Of course I would. Otherwise he'd never look at me."

"You wouldn't want to have him look at you," Meg said. "Not if he really did."

"If he really did? What," asked Mildred sharply, "do you mean by that?"

At once Meg knew that she had blundered and she started talking about Gid, who was the first person she could think of. She tried to tell about their walks and the way they'd prowled about the swamps and meadows and gone searching for old landmarks at the Commons. She tried to tell of everything except Gid's accident and what had followed, but she couldn't stir the slightest interest.

"He's not exciting," Mildred said. "When he's in the room I don't feel any different. In some ways he's kind of silly for a boy."

Then while her voice went on, the train was running through mill country. Below the roadbed lay the course of the Pawtuxet

River. Sometimes it was so narrow that it disappeared from sight below a stretch of scarlet treetops. Sometimes it was wide enough to have small narrow islands; and near every village, it spread broad and still above a dam. Along the brim, it gathered to spill over in a plunge of gleaming white that broke upon the rocks below and went swirling off in a dark current flecked with foam.

Part of the fun in getting out at Adamsville was in finding everything familiar: the dingy little station, its lime-green paint trimmed with dark chocolate, the rust-colored bridge with loose planks that rattled as the carriage drove across them; the red brick company store; even the long row of saloons where Mildred liked to say that the Irish Catholics got drunk on Saturdays; the iron watering trough that stood right in the center of the square. Kitty, the horse, was heading for it as she usually did, and in a minute she was dipping her nose deep and whickering through her nostrils till black ripples washed against the sides above a coating of green slime. Off to the west stood the big Adams mill. Its sharp, granite edges cut the sky. Its windows glittered in broad flashes; and from the belfry pigeons came and went, wheeling high above the trees in a series of short flights.

What Meg liked best about the village street was the way it ran along beside the glimmer of the river, curving where it curved and straightening where it straightened. On either side was a long row of giant elms whose great trunks went soaring up in boughs that latticed overhead. In summertime they made a cool, green leafy tunnel; but now that the foliage was almost gone, the full sun was falling on the small double tenements, making deep blue sockets of the little doors and striping the white pickets of each fence.

The tenements were what made the Adams Homestead seem if anything more lofty. Set far back from the road and built on a high terrace, it towered way above them; and its big curved porches surmounted by white balustrades, its wide extended front and its four soaring chimneys dwindled the mill tenements that ran to its very gates.

No one was more aware of this than Mildred. Whomever she brought home with her she liked to have seem properly impressed.

As the carriage disappeared and she led the way up a long flight of steps, there sat her grandfather.

"He still likes to be addressed as Governor," said Mildred, as she did inevitably.

Somehow Meg felt that didn't matter any longer. What concerned him in these autumn days was to sit in the full glare of sun, edging towards it when it moved and staring off across the vast, smooth terraces of lawn, past the fir trees and the larches at the great stone mill on which he'd spent his life.

Once he saw them coming, he laid down a long cigar which he had been holding in his mouth unlighted, straightened the plaid shawl across his knees, and from somewhere in the folds of a loose coat, drew forth an ear trumpet.

"It's Meg Bailey," Mildred shouted at him, but his dim blue eyes looked only puzzled.

Meg knew the thing she had to do and she stepped up and put her lips close to the long, black tube.

"I'm Samuel Simmons's grandchild," she called as clearly as she could.

At once his face had brightened and he was holding out to her a finely wrinkled hand that was mottled with brown spots.

"Why, bless my soul," he said. "Samuel Simmons's grandchild. That means you're more than welcome. I wish your grandfather had come himself."

Meg didn't want to think of Grandpa's being here. What would happen to him in this hearty, noisy household when even right at home he sought a corner where he thought he didn't show?

Governor Adams was remembering an old friend who was an utter stranger to his granddaughter.

"The trouble with your grandfather," he said, "is that he tried to bear the brunt of the whole Simmons failure. He wouldn't save a penny for himself. Then he wouldn't let us start him off again. Why, there were a dozen of us at the time who would have stood in back of him. But he kept on insisting that he never meant again to handle anybody's money."

Meg could see Grandpa handling Mother's market money. No sooner did he get back home from shopping than he cleared a little space off on a table and emptied out his little leather coin

purse and waited till her mother had counted out the change to the last penny. It was a thing that her mother couldn't bear to do and yet it was the only way to make him feel at peace.

"Be sure to tell your grandfather," Governor Adams's thin voice added, "that I still put the highest value on his friendship."

Meg had barely time to nod before the Jastrum family were about her. Mr. Jastrum looked the way he always did, as though he'd used the finest military brushes on his burnished silver hair and the best soap on his ruddy skin and the highest polish on his russet shoes and had just walked into a new suit made for him by the most expensive tailor. Mrs. Jastrum was so short that she was talking with her round face tilted up and with her tiny little features all foreshortened and with nothing of her figure showing except a great cascade of Irish lace and fluted frills that fell between the neat reverses of her tweed suit. Little Winifred with her stiff black bang and blacker eyes was staring solemnly. Meg knew how seldom she liked Mildred's friends and the blunt opinions she was capable of uttering. She felt more comfortable when the stare was interrupted by Mrs. Jastrum's kiss and her command.

"Mildred, take Meg up to John's room. Your brother won't be home and I've got to give the guest room to your Uncle Phil. You know the way he fusses over stairs. Meg won't mind if I put her up on the third floor."

Once that she was there and changing into her blue cashmere dress, Meg knew how much she minded. For one thing it meant that Mildred's brother, John, would be away and though he was older and at college, he was one man whom she did talk to easily. But while she dressed, she reckoned with another reason why she didn't want his room. It was a reason of which she was ashamed.

It was an ugly room. Its high walls were darkened by a pattern of brown ferns against a tannish background and by great sepia pictures of the Appian Way and of Hadrian's Wall and the ruins of the Coliseum. The furniture was the heaviest black walnut and the big bureau and commode and washstand had heavy marble slabs. Its dreariness, however, she had never minded until now. She had even liked the only book she'd ever found there, a copy of Gray's *Elegy* with cold gray steel engravings. Often enough

she had lighted the oil lamp and lain in bed and learned some stanzas before breakfast. Or sometimes when she'd heard the pealing of the mill bell, she had sat at the dark window and stared out to watch the mill hands going to work; the only sign of them the winking lanterns in their hands.

This year, though, it was quite different. Among the furniture about John's room, there was only one good mirror. That was the oval mirror to the shaving-stand and no matter how she tilted it, it only showed her face.

Downstairs in the guest room was the heavy, full-length pier glass. It was so enormous that it showed not only her but the whole luxurious room in which she slept, if only for a night. Besides, on a chaise longue on which she loved to see herself reclining was a Chinese shawl that was embroidered with rose-colored flowers and fringed with long silk tassels. When she was absolutely sure that Mildred wasn't coming in again, she could take off her dress, tuck down her corset cover, and wrap the Chinese shawl about her like a royal robe.

If she did that, she wasn't plain. There wasn't any reason why the most attractive boy in Providence shouldn't beg to let her wear his Alpha Delt' pin or take her out canoeing at Hunts Mills.

Seen in the pier glass, she looked like a heroine in one of Marion Crawford's novels. Or was it that she looked like Hall Caine's "Gloria" who had sinned and led astray a righteous clergyman? She might go on the stage and be the leading lady whom Robert Edeson made love to. Her hair not only waved. It had a tinge of russet. Somebody had said that. Somebody had said that her eyes were wide apart and nicely set and that her face would have good bones when they began to show. Had they begun? She couldn't tell by peering in a shaving-stand. What it showed was her high color that her mother said would tone down soon enough.

Mildred had come into the room without a sound.

"Goodness, you don't have to stand and prink," she said. "You're not down at Little Compton and Linc Bogert isn't going to look at you. Whatever made you think he had?" her voice was wheedling. "Was it just because it's only older men who pay you compliments?"

"They don't pay me compliments," Meg contradicted crossly. "I wish they wouldn't notice me."

"Do you?" Mildred mocked as she slipped an arm in Meg's and started for the door. "Then you'd better send down word you're sick and have dinner sent up here. You're going to sit across the table from my Uncle Phil."

CHAPTER XVII

The Jastrums' dining room was just the way Meg liked to think about it. On the long mahogany sideboard, the silver candlesticks were lighted; and on the table, the four silver candelabra with their shades of shirred rose silk were casting a deep glow on a bowl of shaggy pink chrysanthemums and on the crystal goblets and the twinkling little sherry glasses and on the plates with their rich borders of deep royal blue and gold.

Mrs. Jastrum, too, was presiding over dinner as Meg liked to think of her as doing. She made it seem tremendously important. Not the soup course. That she barely noticed. But the moment that was over, she kept glancing backward every time the pantry door swung open; and her bright black, birdlike eyes considered and passed judgment on each dish.

Meg was sitting in her favorite seat on the right of Mr. Jastrum. As she watched him carve the deep, rich sizzling steak she knew that Grandmother was right. Carving was a man's accomplishment. There was something masculine and powerful and final in the movement of his hands.

And like Mrs. Jastrum, he made food matter awfully. "A nice little piece of tenderloin," he'd said when it had been Meg's turn and with a knowing look that wasn't quite a wink, he had served her with a very special cut and made her feel she had a taste he shared.

At the moment, he was eating slowly and with gusto. The zest with which he ate seemed somehow to be the reason for the glisten of his silver hair and the clear blueness of his eyes and the ruddy color of his face with its full, handsome features.

If Meg were at home, she knew that by the time this stage was reached in dinner, they would all be through at least the second

argument with no one caring if the food got cold if he could prove a point. But here everyone was eating without talking. Old Governor Adams had hung his black ear trumpet on his chair, had tucked his napkin in his waistcoat, and had spread it wide in a way that would have made Meg miserable if Grandpa had done it before company. He was actually using a pronged silver pusher as though it didn't matter in the least. Seated by him, Mrs. Adams, very old and small and dainty, had divided what was on her plate into separate small portions and was eating what she liked the best. Mrs. Jastrum, with white plump hands, was very busy grinding pepper from a special pepper pot or savoring a sauce and adding salt and butter. Little Winnie was munching solemnly. Mildred, by her side, Meg couldn't see. But right across from her sat "Uncle Phil."

And he was exactly like "Old Pen." He was the old Major to the life, even to his light buff-colored waistcoat threaded with a fine red plaid, even to his carefully brushed side whiskers, even to his heavy mottled face. What's more, he wanted goose livers and champagne and thought this all plain fare, judging by the glances that he gave it.

"Joey, what about a touch of Bourbon," he demanded as he set his sherry glass aside.

In a moment, he was pouring whiskey from a big cut-glass decanter and now that he was raising the thin, long tumbler to his lips, Meg saw that he was staring straight at her. He was staring in a way that made her hand go to her waistline and blouse up her blue cashmere dress.

Mr. Jastrum had stopped eating now and while he waited for dessert, he was absorbed in talking about politics.

"Nobody wants a bronco-buster in the White House," he was saying to his brother. "Too bad we can't cook up another little war to keep the fellow busy. He can't do any harm to business when he's charging up and down a hill with his Rough Riders. But what's he doing getting after business and slugging it with a big stick as though it was a criminal? Did McKinley think that it was criminal? No. He was the kind of President the country needs."

He was talking about President Roosevelt and the turn of

fortune that had put him into office. If Meg thought hard enough about him, she could forget that "Uncle Phil" was eyeing her. T.R. Teddy. And for some strange reason, Grandma Simmons's hero. Grandmother cut out all the pictures she could find of him; especially the ones that showed him very fierce and bristling with his square teeth showing. The very fiercest she had placed up on her mantelpiece near a photograph of Grandfather as though to show what she'd expected out of life and what she'd got.

"Well," Mr. Jastrum was continuing, "at least we have one man in the Senate who'll defend our interests. Nelson Aldrich won't take much from a young cub who's never even had to add up his own check book. Let Roosevelt try to tamper with the tariff and there'll be a spill ahead for our Rough Rider."

Nelson Aldrich, the great Senator with the vast estate at Warwick and the boat-house whose high tower was a landmark for anybody sailing on the Narragansett. To Meg, he was Dick's father; Dick, polite and gentle, who sometimes asked her for the Second Lancers, but never for the First or the Cotillion. If he ever did, she knew how much her mother would be pleased.

Mr. Jastrum kept talking on about a tariff wall that should be built up even higher. He made it seem so actual and solid that Meg could see it rising thick and firm. But "Uncle Phil" didn't seem to take the slightest interest in it. Politics, he kept saying, were a dirty business and not fit for a gentleman to soil his hands with. At last as though he meant to tease her in a kindly fashion, Mr. Jastrum turned to Meg.

"I suppose your father is a Democrat," he said. "Professors always are."

"My father was a Cleveland Democrat," she said. She had no idea of what that meant, but she had heard it as a statement made with pride.

"Sure he wasn't taken in by Bryan and his wind-bag oratory?" Mr. Jastrum asked. "Free silver's just the kind of slogan to catch the ear of a professor. Never knew one yet that had the foggiest idea of economics."

"My father didn't vote for Bryan, Sir," Meg said. She was thinking of a bleak November day when she had been allowed to go along and wait outside the little one-room voting booth set up

on a vacant lot on Congdon Street. "My father told me that if Bryan got elected, he didn't care to live."

"Didn't know he was as sound as that," said Mr. Jastrum.

There was something condescending in his tone of voice that Meg resented fiercely.

"It doesn't mean my father isn't sound," she said, "because he is a botanist. Botany is all that he has time for."

"All that he has time for?"

Mr. Jastrum made it sound like child's play; like fiddling with a lot of plants for no good reason. Meg thought of all the hours of patient toil it took not alone for teaching classes, but for microscopic work and for careful surveys for the Government.

"Botany does take time," she said. "It takes as much as knowing about making money or as running mills."

Mr. Jastrum smiled indulgently. He didn't mind her being rude because he felt himself so sure and so superior.

"That sounds," he said, "a little funny coming from a grandchild of the Simmons family. If he were alive to hear, your great-grandfather would have a thing or two to say to you. If there ever was a man who gave himself to running textile mills and making money . . ."

Meg sat thinking of the end of the old Senator. Even if he had been harshly treated, he'd had an end that couldn't come to her own father. Not possibly could she imagine Father going out to walk only at dusk because he was afraid to show his face by day.

Mr. Jastrum was now talking in a different voice.

"Too bad," he was saying and he sounded sad. "Too bad a man can't leave his brains to his own son. It seems as though he ought to have the right to."

If he was thinking of his own son John, John at least was not like Gid who hated textile mills and anything to do with them. Pitifully John wanted to learn the business from the very bottom. But if it was he whom Mr. Jastrum had in mind, he didn't mean to mention him.

"Look at old Senator Simmons," he was saying. "He had eight sons to his credit. They say he was a cockadoodle over having nothing else but sons. They say he used to shake his wattles if

anyone suggested he could have a female offspring. Used to swear that if that ever happened, it would be because he'd had to stay too long in Washington and Congress hadn't recessed. Well, see what happened to the sons."

With her eyes fixed on her plate, Meg thought of Grandpa, who had taken every cent he had to pay his father's debts and who without a word had used up Grandma Simmons's dowry. She thought of Great-uncle James, who'd gone traipsing out to California for gold and been eaten up by wolves. Of Walter, who had died, and Fred, who'd died without achieving much except a family. Great-uncle Simon didn't count because he'd married a rich wife. But there was Great-uncle Woodbury, who was allowed to live out in the cold, unheated ell of the old Simmons Homestead. An Italian who had bought it let him live there out of kindness. There was Great-uncle Charlie . . .

It was he of whom Mr. Jastrum was now speaking. "Why, I can remember," he was saying, "when Charlie Simmons was referred to as Beau Brummel. Now nobody even knows where he is living."

Meg did. He was living in the chicken-shed. With no more than that to start with, he had built with his own hands the darlingest little house that ever was. Dickens would have loved to write about it. It had a small bow window just big enough to hold a checker table for two cronies and a mirror that let down from the wall and suddenly stuck out four legs and became a dinner table. It had a picture that swung out from the wall and made the panel to a china closet. And it had a tiny spiral staircase that led up to a bedroom on the floor above. It had all manner of contraptions and Meg loved to visit it, but she didn't want to talk about it here at Adamsville.

Apparently she wouldn't have to. Mr. Jastrum was attacking the same subject from a different angle.

"The queerest thing about the Simmons stock," he started off, "is the way the men all petered out and the brains got passed down to the women. Take your mother. Nothing's ever stumped her. I can remember when she got herself engaged—at sixteen, wasn't it?—to a man old enough to be her father. Used to wonder how she'd manage. Not that Whit Bailey hadn't charm.

Had to take a hand myself. Had to pack my sister, Lily, off to Europe with a chaperon until she got some sense about him."

Lily. Mrs. Codman. Gid's mother, who had treated Meg so specially; who liked to talk of her own youth and her companionship with Father out at Hillwood.

"My sister thought that she could live on love and air," Mr. Jastrum was continuing. "Last person in the world who could. Her doctor's bills for just one month would soak up a professor's salary. No, it took someone like your mother who could swing the family herself."

"My father swings it, Sir," Meg interrupted.

"He does," Mr. Jastrum didn't seem convinced. "Thought your mother taught. Thought she had a job in Boston."

"That's just," Meg urged, "because she wants so many things for me and Whitman. You see, she wants to have me go through college."

"You go through college. Why?" Mr. Jastrum's eyes were on Meg. So, she was aware, were "Uncle Phil's." "What made your mother take that notion? Only plain girls go to college even when they haven't got a sou. A girl who has your looks picks up a husband."

"But there are lots of things I'd like to learn," Meg uttered desperately. If she could only think of what they were, then maybe she could stop his being quite so personal. "I'd like to learn to write. I'd like to be an authoress."

"An authoress." Mr. Jastrum laughed. If she'd said she wished to be a circus freak, he could not have made her longing seem more odd and more ridiculous. "No," he was advising, "you just sit back and play your cards and you won't have to worry over learning anything. Mr. Right will come along and be glad you haven't filled your brain with fiddle-faddles. Last thing he'll want will be a wife with brains."

Luckily dessert was being served and in a moment, he was busy eating cut-up peaches that were covered with a yellow cream that was so thick it wouldn't pour. Mrs. Jastrum, apparently had seen Meg's plight and her embarrassment, for she was speaking now to Mildred.

"You girls needn't wait unless you want to. Why don't you run

along? There's a nice fire in the library. You can have it to yourselves. Winnie will be going up to bed and nobody will bother you. We're going to have our coffee served in the front room."

Soon Mildred had her feet up on the polished fender. She was wearing patent leather shoes and black silk stockings with red clocks. Meg, too, had put up her own feet and was busy watching the white birch logs char in silver squares outlined with flame until they crumbled into a soft ash.

But somehow the evening had been spoiled. Though they had the warm, rich lamplit room all to themselves, all that Mildred wished to talk about was marriage and the way to go about achieving it. Her father was correct, she said. A woman's college would spoil anybody's chances.

No, there was the one right finishing school she'd have to go to till she did come out. There were the right connections that she'd have to make and the right patronesses whom she'd have to be polite to. There were the friends who were desirable and those who weren't.

"I guess I'm not desirable," Meg said at last. "I don't see why you ask me out to visit you."

"But you are desirable," said Mildred firmly. "That's the funny thing about you. Nobody in Providence seems to mind because your mother has to teach or because your father's a professor. People in Providence like to treat your family as being very special. The queerer things you do, the better everybody seems to like you. They all have their own favorite Bailey story. Mine's about the guinea pig you used to keep up in the bathroom. Goodness, how I used to envy you when I went to your mother's kindergarten. I used to ask to be excused so that I could go upstairs and hear him squeak."

She had made Meg's mind go back to Pinnie's squeaking. It had begun the very moment that her father's key had sounded in the lock to the front door. Pinnie had been sure of a handful of fresh grass.

"Dad's pet story," Mildred was continuing, "is about your father's daring to get married on a salary of six hundred dollars. He says that anybody else would have thought that was mere chicken feed."

"I'm glad he dared," Meg said. "It's only that I don't see why we have to go on seeming quite so funny."

"But if you weren't, nobody'd pay the least attention to you. As it is you get away with everything."

"I don't get away with everything," Meg contradicted her.

"Oh, yes, you do," Mildred came back quickly. "You don't suppose that I could go and stay all by myself down at the Seaburys' boardinghouse. Everyone would start to talk. As it was, my family thought that it was queer for you to be allowed to. They made Gid awfully mad because they started in to criticize."

"They made Gid mad?" Meg asked. These days, he seemed the last person to stand up for her.

"Yes," Mildred said. "He came out here to visit soon after he'd come home from Little Compton. He said he'd seen you down there and he told how you were really by yourself. Then Mother began on what was proper for a girl of your age and you should have heard him. 'Meg can do anything she likes,' he told her. 'She can do anything she likes because she doesn't stop to think what others think about her doing it.' Gid said that made it different."

Did it? If it did, he knew why she had kissed him swiftly on both eyes because he'd needed so to feel that they didn't show the awful things they'd stared at. Then why did he keep away from her? Could it be because he was ashamed of what he'd told her?

While Mildred's voice was racing on, Meg was still pondering. She was still pondering when Mildred told her it was time for them to go into the drawing-room and say good-night.

As Meg kissed her cheek, Mrs. Jastrum puckered up her mouth and kissed the air. "Get a good beauty sleep," she said.

"Yes," said Mr. Jastrum as he stood up and took her hand, "and think over my advice and go dream about a handsome husband."

The only person left to be polite to was "Old Pen." As he looked down at her, Meg saw he was absurdly like the illustration of the Major in the worn old Thackeray at home; so much so that she thought about her father's message to him. "Tell him that I share his tastes." But under cover of the family conversation, it was "Uncle Phil" who was addressing her.

"I have a little filly," he was saying. "Waduda. That's her name. Waduda, Queen of the Desert, when I enter her in races up at Saratoga. Bought an Arab boy to go along with her. Spent quite a tidy fortune on them. How'd you like to see her?"

"I should like to, Sir," Meg said. It seemed the only thing to say.

"Good," he said. "I'll bring her round next Sunday at three sharp. Be sure to pin your bonnet on. She goes like lightning."

"I don't want to rattle round in dog-carts," was what Meg wanted dreadfully to tell him; but before she had a chance to say a word, he had changed his tone of voice and said good-night most formally and she and Mildred were on their way upstairs.

CHAPTER XVIII

All night long, Meg had only slept in snatches and as she had turned and twisted, she had been troubled by her thoughts. Not those of Gid. She knew that she had reached the clue to his avoidance of her. He had told her what he'd never meant to tell to anyone and he felt terribly ashamed.

But if only Mr. Jastrum hadn't been so condescending . . . If Mildred hadn't said the things she had about everybody's having a pet Bailey story . . . Was it true that Baileys didn't act like anybody else?

Suddenly Meg thought of Cousin Julia. Cousin Julia wasn't just an odd old woman who didn't mind her faded hat or cotton gloves or her fleabitten mare or old Patsy who had no resemblance to an ordinary coachman. Oddness was something that she could afford when other people couldn't. She was in her own way the very finest lady in Rhode Island. Even Mr. Jastrum said so. He liked to tell about her nephews, one a Senator and one a Governor and how they'd both announced that they'd rather try to go against the will of Blind Boss Brayton up at the State Capitol than they would to storm her gates.

Meg could storm them though because of Cousin Julia's friendship for her father. Years and years ago hadn't she told him that

she kept a latch-key out for him? Ever since he'd been a boy hadn't she offered him a refuge from the terrors and the splendors out at Hillwood? These days, it had turned into a refuge and a respite from the Simmons family. Not that anybody said so. "If I were you," Mother would announce, "I'd pack my bag and go to Cousin Julia's for a day or two." Upstairs in the old Revolutionary house that had the loveliest fanlight to its door, wasn't there the room that Cousin Julia kept reserved for him? Sometimes when Meg had gone to visit her alone, she'd been allowed to sleep there in the carved pineapple bed. But except for such odd times the room was never used. It was her father's when he needed peace.

That meant that Cousin Julia thought about him as a very special person. So would she talk about him if Meg stole off in the early dawn and found her. She would be up and out of doors. Glare, she said, was what she hated. She liked to work in soil when it was cool and to handle flowers before they opened for the day and started to show off.

Behind the Jastrums' house, the pine grove was a colonnade of jet-black tree trunks and the deep bedding of pine needles was slippery underfoot. When Meg reached a clearing of white birches, their yellow leaves were pale as moonlight and along the wood road where she scuffled ankle-deep in drifts of leaves, the autumn colors only faintly showed.

At last off to the left, she saw the looming shapes of the twin spruce trees and the simple outlines of a big white house. Its little window panes had caught the sparkle of the reddening sunrise. So had the fanlight just above the door. But the delicate fine carving and the beadwork needed the full light to bring out the delicacy of the builder's craft.

Sure enough, down on her knees and clad in an old coat, was Cousin Julia. She had a mat spread out on the damp grass and she was planting bulbs along the length of her white picket fence. She was so busy that it seemed too bad to bother her.

"It's only Meg."

That call would make her know she needn't stop.

But at once Cousin Julia turned and made a thatch out of her hands. "No," she said. "It isn't only Meg. It's a great moth that's

fluttered in on me from somewhere. A cecropia is what you make me think of; some moth that's warm and velvety and rich."

"Please, please don't talk about my looks," Meg begged as she came close and knelt down on the mat.

In her lap at once were placed some tulip bulbs and an old trowel. As soon as she had used her stock, it was replenished from a burlap bag. For a long time she went on planting. Then almost unconsciously she said what she was thinking.

"I wish that Gid was here. He even likes to plant our crocuses. He doesn't care how many or how small. The only ones that he can have at home he has to put way out of sight behind the stable. You see he's not allowed to do a thing on his own grounds. His father thinks that it's demeaning."

"Demeaning?" Cousin Julia asked.

"Yes, his father says it's work for menials who get paid for it. Gid has to do it secretly."

"Would you like to bring him out to see my garden?"

"If I only could," Meg said.

She could imagine Gid among the helter-skelter bloom that ran away with any sort of flower beds and sometimes landed in the pastures. Way out against a gray stone wall, she could remember chancing on tall spires of dark blue larkspur that had sprung up from a compost heap and been allowed to grow. And often she had come on Shirley poppies opening their crinkled petals of bright red and coral pink among the rows of beets and cabbages. Then there were the primroses, mere roadside weeds to anybody else, but to Cousin Julia very beautiful. When they were at their height, Meg knew her father was asked out to watch them open their chrome yellow petals in the twilight just as he was always asked to see the Crown Imperials when they sent up their tall single stalks that were each topped by a fierce stiff whorl of green and adorned with a full circlet of saffron-colored bells. These were the only formal flower that Cousin Julia loved.

"Could I really bring Gid out?" Meg asked.

"You can fetch him any time you like," Cousin Julia said and added. "I take it that he's not the one who's made remarks about your looks."

"He's never noticed them. He doesn't care a thing about them."

Then Meg told of how she and Gid had played together in the Maxcey yard. She told of how they liked to walk in sleet and rain and snow and how they had tramped through the salt marshes down at Little Compton. Finally she reached his accident that wasn't any accident. Out she poured her terror of it. As she stopped short, Cousin Julia said,

"I don't mean to be impertinent, but if he's coming out to see me, perhaps I'd better know his name."

Once she heard it, she sat silent for a long, long time while the slanting sunlight which had grown much clearer brought out the carving of her proud old face.

"Mostly," she began, "when people give advice, they do it out of mischief. I'm sure that I'm not doing it from that, not to Whit Bailey's child. But a lot has got to happen before a person's placed to help another person. It's as though the stars had got to be just so up in the firmament, moved by celestial laws until they're poised in the right relation to each other. There can't be any jostling if help is going to come out right."

Meg didn't understand, but she knew that the word "jostling" made her think of Cousin Cora Simmons and her kind of questioning.

"You've been here times enough to know," Cousin Julia's voice was going on. "You wouldn't say I was unhappy, would you? You wouldn't say I hadn't made myself a life? Well, there was a time when I thought that I was making it out of sticks and straws. And maybe mud. I remember that I got the hang of watching mud wasps working underneath the eaves and seeing how they shaped their cells to octagons as though it mattered to some power above them. I can recall the very moment when I knew I wasn't going to let a mud wasp beat me at working out some sort of pattern. Your father's been the only one who's understood what I was up to. That kind of kinship's a rare thing. It's the kind that I'd like to see you give to Gid."

Kinship. Cousin Julia had used precisely the right word for a closeness that had sprung up between two children. It reached way back to their first meeting. From there, it had gone on with an understanding that was deeper than their quarrels. There were the things they understood about each other. Things that other

people never guessed at. The shames that other people made them feel, they never felt before each other. There were the things they didn't talk about, but that was because they didn't have to. They were as close as that.

"I don't know Gid," Cousin Julia said, "but I know his parents well enough to be aware of how he's going to need you. He'll have to study mud wasps too or almost any sort of critter that learns to shape a life alone and make a go of it."

"Why will he have to live alone?" Meg asked.

"Because you make him sound as though he had the sense to keep away from mating. Oddities can't do a mite of harm when kept in an odd body. At times they even work for good. It's when they get passed down that they work harm to innocents. Gid's reckoned with that somehow, I suspect. He'd learned it when he dived from off that cliff at Little Compton. It's more than you can bear till you get used to it. I was reckoning with not mating when I met your father and he gave me something that's as rare as a good marriage though it's not so fruitful."

"Not so fruitful," Meg repeated.

"No," Cousin Julia said. "And it's not that I don't think your father doesn't rate my friendship high in all of the rich bounty that's been given him."

"Rich?" Meg asked; for that was not the way that Mr. Jastrum saw it.

"Yes, rich." Cousin Julia spoke with emphasis. "Your father has had deep lasting friendships, hasn't he? And he's had affection from all sorts of people. From grandees and simple folk alike. And hasn't he done his chosen work and used his own fine mind the way he wished to use it? Most people can't afford it. Then besides, he's had his marriage and his children. He's had you especially."

"Me?" Meg asked, bewildered.

"Yes, you," said Cousin Julia. "I don't believe there ever was a little girl who was more dearly loved."

She had sent Meg's thoughts back to all the hours she had spent in her father's study; to the first day of all when he had taken her upstairs and given her a space on his own desk. As Meg sat thinking of how he had always made her feel that he had time

for her and of how she had kept away of late for fear he'd talk of things she didn't want to hear, she began to loosen up the soil and crumble it. Suddenly she knew that there was something else that she had on her mind.

"Would you say my mother was rich too?" she asked.

"Your mother?" Cousin Julia's voice was much less certain. "Your mother seemed a child when she was married. I was at her wedding. I was with your Cousin Will. I remember her as quite the loveliest bride I've ever seen. But I've never known her very well. You see, she's so much younger that we wouldn't have a thing to talk about."

Meg knew that that was not the reason why her mother never came out here to visit. She and Cousin Julia would never have a thought in common. Her mother couldn't sit and speculate. Her ideas were bold ones but they were ideas that she could turn to use.

"This much I'm sure of," Cousin Julia said. "Your mother's a born fighter. She won't let herself be downed by anything or anyone. And she won't let you be downed, what's more. From what your father says, she's going to see you on your feet and get you started. She seems to think that college is the way to do it."

"But suppose that I don't want to go to college?"

Cousin Julia's face looked troubled.

"I'm not the one," she said, "to tell you much about it. I never had what you could call an education. Only odd scraps and ends of reading and what I've picked up from your father. But I'd think that college was a place where you could tumble round among the arts and sciences. Some of them you're bound to take a fancy to. Besides, you'll come out free to bide your time and look around. You can support yourself and you won't feel you've got to snap at the first chance at marriage."

"But," Meg broke in, "Mr. Jastrum thinks I ought to snap at it."

"Joe Jastrum." Cousin Julia gave a snort. "All he thinks you want is money and a groaning dinner table. Is that what either of your parents married for? You can tell him that you came from very different stock."

"I'll have to go back to the house," Meg said, "and tell him something anyhow."

Cousin Julia had had her breakfast hours ago, but at the Jastrums, the maids in their light-colored morning uniforms would be coming through the swinging door and setting the long table and bringing in the silver coffee urn.

As Meg stood up to take her leave, Cousin Julia stood up too. She was chary of displaying the least sign of her affection. But for the first time ever, she kissed Meg's cheek before she said good-bye.

"For a woman who's an oddity," she added, "I'm going to call attention to myself by setting out a pretty giddy garden. When it's at its height next spring, you're to bring that Gid of yours to see it. I can show him that there're better ways of managing than pitching himself headlong off of cliffs and rocks."

CHAPTER XIX

It was late afternoon and as Meg came into the house, she heard her mother calling to her from their room. As soon as she had taken off her hat and coat, she went upstairs.

She only had to give one glance to know that something was the matter and that it had to do with her.

"Why on earth," her mother asked, "should you be getting letters from the Hope Club?"

It wasn't letters. It was one single envelope of heavy, creamy, mottled paper and it had the Hope Club crest at the left of the top corner.

"I suppose that someone knew I was collecting monograms," Meg said as she sat down and broke a heavy seal of dark blue wax.

But she was wrong. She was reading words that terrified her. The note ran:

"Dear Miss Margaret,

"This is only to remind you that this Sunday shortly after three, I shall bring Waduda to your door and trust that she will meet your expectations.

"Cordially yours,

"Philip Jastrum."

Quickly Meg's mind went back to a story that Grandma Simons used to tell when she was little. In a new gig, Great-uncle

Walter had driven up as proud as Cuffey, but even when he'd hitched his horse and gone up to the door to take Great-aunt Lizzie for a drive she often had refused to go.

"I don't have to go," Meg said. "When he comes and rings the bell, Bridget's not to answer it."

"When who rings the bell?" her mother asked, and took the note and read it. Then she inquired, "What's a Waduda anyhow?"

"It's a horrid horse that has an Arab boy to go along with it," Meg said. "Mr. Philip Jastrum paid a fortune for them, but I never told him that I'd like to see them."

"You must have told him that you would," her mother's voice was anxious. "A man of Mr. Jastrum's age and reputation has more important things to do than to bring Wadudas round for a young girl to see unless she's begged him to and he thinks he has to do it out of kindness. Even then, I don't see why he should."

"I didn't beg," Meg interrupted. "I said good night to him and that was all. I hated him because he sat across the dinner table and kept staring at me. He was exactly like 'Old Pen,' the Major in *Pendennis*; and he kept on goggling at me."

"If he did, you must have made yourself conspicuous in some way."

"No," Meg protested. "It was my blue cashmere dress that made me. I did try to blouse it up, but it kept on tugging right across the front."

Her mother thought that was the silliest explanation. Mr. Philip Jastrum was a man of years. He'd seen girls and women all his life. On his trips abroad, he'd seen the famous beauties of every capital in Europe. Surely Meg didn't think . . .

"No," she heard herself break in. "All my life I've known I should have been the boy. But that doesn't mean that Mr. Jastrum didn't stare at me, because he did."

Her mother could not imagine what had happened to her mind. Something, she said, had happened to it down at Little Compton. Up till then, Meg had been the most unconscious child. Then she had come home absolutely different. Now she seemed to think that every older man was staring at her.

Suppose her mother knew about her drive with Dr. Bogert.

He too had seen girls and women all his life and had the reputation of being far the most attractive man in Providence if you didn't mind his being "wild." Yet he had wanted to come down on the rocks especially to see Meg dive.

"Why you were so young and innocent," her mother said, "that things could happen all around you and you didn't even notice them."

"I always noticed them."

"When, I'd like to know," her mother said. "If you did, you didn't show it."

"No," Meg said, "I didn't show it."

She sat thinking of some things that she had buried very deep.

Meanwhile her mother was considering what she called "the present crisis."

"There's no use," she was saying, "in my talking to your father. He'd be sure to think this invitation was as innocent as it would be if he'd suggested it. He'd go out with you to the curb and see you off with Mr. Jastrum and wish you both a lovely drive."

When Grandmother was asked for her advice, she wasn't any help at all. Mother, she said, was making a pretty howdy-do about a lot of nonsense. There was no fool like an old fool, she announced, and there was no sense in doing more than writing that if Mr. Jastrum wished to take a young one jaunting, he could find her in a likelier sort of house. "All the same," she added, "I'd like to know what would have happened if I'd started in to pester you the way you're pestering Meg."

Grandmother was furious, too, when Meg's mother said that the wisest thing for her to do was to run next door and have a consultation with Belle Bailey, who did know the world and how to deal with it.

"People who spend their time in turning down their calling cards in different corners, aren't apt to know much else." Grandmother said. "Your Belle Bailey's bound to rouse a tempest over nothing. You just watch."

But Meg's mother hadn't stopped to listen and was off at once to hold a conference in the big yellow house next door.

And Grandmother was right. Cousin Belle did rouse a tempest. First Meg had to post her mother's note to Mrs. Jastrum who sent

a note back promptly and then there were more notes while she felt miserable and silly to be the object of so much commotion. Did Mrs. Jastrum also feel that Meg had made herself conspicuous in some way? Had she told Mildred all about it and had Mildred told the other girls who'd laugh and make a joke of getting such an invitation from an old, old man? Such a thing would never happen, not to Amey whom everyone respected. Nor to Carrie. When Carrie spoke of going out with older men, she meant those at Brown or Harvard, not old gentlemen who wrote their letters from the Hope Club. It wouldn't happen to a single soul except herself, Meg knew. But at least she didn't have to do a thing about it. It had been made clear to "Uncle Phil" that she was not to be allowed to go out for a drive.

Meg had thought the matter was all over with, but the next afternoon Bridget answered the front door bell and came back with the most enormous cardboard box that was tied with broad blue satin ribbon and that had great stalks that stuck out from one end.

"It's for Miss Meg," she said. "Praise God, if she ain't started in at having beaux."

Before Bridget and her mother, Meg was untying the blue ribbon slowly and taking off the cover marked heavily with a gilt lettering. Inside was green wax paper and a narrow little envelope that held a card. There was nothing for it but to open it. "With my most sincere regrets, Philip Jastrum," the card read.

"I do wish I hadn't had to hurt his feelings," Meg burst forth, but her mother didn't say a word.

Below the green wax paper were chrysanthemums, each as big and round as a white chandelier globe and once that they were lifted out and laid down on the floor for want of any better place, their thick, long heavy stalks stretched out like stilts beyond a ruffling of great silvery green leaves.

"What's this? The Horticultural Show?" Meg heard her father ask as he came into the room and sat down in a chair.

Then for the first time her mother told him the whole story. But she couldn't make him take it seriously.

"Speciosum Grandiflorum," he remarked. "Let's set one up beam-end and see if it lifts up the ceiling."

It was when he spoke like that that he aroused impatience.

"You don't behave," the comment came, "as though you thought this had one thing to do with Meg."

"It hasn't," he spoke quickly. "You don't suppose my child can look at blooms like that as anything but freaks and hideosities. Why, Lordy, to get rid of them we'll have to send for Adams's Express. How will we ever clear the house of them?"

"We won't. I don't see how we can. They cost too much to throw away."

Only once in a great while as now, Meg heard her mother set a money value on some object that had no other value to her. It wasn't the least like her and because it wasn't the least like her, Meg knew her father hated it. Sometimes he said it was unworthy and sometimes he said he might be living with an utter stranger.

"For all I know of what goes on inside your mind I might be living with a Fiji Islander," he was saying at the moment as Meg started in to fill the biggest vases and jardinières and went for the umbrella stand out in the hall.

At the time, placing them about the different rooms had kept her busy. But while they were sitting at the table after dinner, the enormous white chrysanthemums began to loom at her from everywhere. No matter where she looked, she saw them. They reproached her from the barricade they made before the marble fireplace and way off through the open double doors, they glimmered from the side of the piano or against the shadows of the furthest corners. Then suddenly their splendor seemed so awfully silly in the midst of the worn, comfortable things that she was used to, that she felt herself begin to laugh.

And the worst part was that she couldn't stop. She couldn't stop to save her life. Nothing that her mother said could make her.

"They keep on looking sillier and sillier. I never knew that any flowers could seem so foolish," Meg managed to remark, but still she went on laughing.

"Superbums can. That's exactly what they do," her father said. "But at least they can't take root in any soil we have to offer. We'll make them wither up with shame."

Shame. That was exactly what Meg felt. The shame of having

made herself conspicuous in some way. Before she knew it, she had started in to cry.

"They'll last for days and days," she sobbed. "They'll get their stems cut down and go on lasting. They're like the Scarlet Letter only that they're white. I don't believe that I can go on living with them."

Suddenly she heard her Grandma Simmons, who was speaking in a voice that cut clear through the sound of sobs.

"Eliza," she was saying. "Those flowers aren't yours. They're Meg's. She has the right to do just what she wants with them. And since she doesn't want them bouncing in her face . . ."

In a jiffy, Grandmother had wrestled with the barricade before the fireplace and had gathered it into her arms. The great, green stalks seemed just as tall as she and each white globe seemed bigger than her head. Then in a flash, she had contrived to open up a window and had pitched her burden out of doors.

"There," she said. "That's a start of ending all this foolishness. You can take the others to Belle Bailey if you have a mind to. She's the sort to fancy them and set some store on having them around her. But Meg's not to be tormented any longer. She's stood enough from folks who know the world and how to deal with it . . ."

"Is Mrs. Simmons taken sick?" asked Grandfather in his mild voice as he watched Grandma heading for the next vase.

"No, Sir, no." Father shook his head. Then he went on although he knew that Grandfather couldn't hear him. "Mrs. Simmons is a woman to admire. She is a woman of swift action. What she did, I should have done if I had the courage of a squeaking mouse. I haven't."

It was then that Meg looked sidewise at her mother and saw how dreadfully she seemed alone as she began to speak.

"I do all of the wrong things for Meg. I do all of the wrong things when I want everything to be so right for her. I keep on blundering and blundering as though I hadn't any sense. What's the use in teaching school and being able to write textbooks and giving her the chances that I never had, if I'm always and forever going to hurt her feelings? Can't I do a single thing for her that isn't wrong?"

Quickly Meg was at her side.

"You do," she said. "You have. Remember when the other Baileys sent a box of dresses that they thought you could make over for me? You never even tried to make them over. You sent them to the Orphanage. You said you'd cut my dresses out of our own curtains and our bedspreads before you'd make me wear my cousin's cast-off clothes."

"Darling," her mother said, "that was about the least that I could do for you."

"No," Meg said, "it wasn't. It would have been so easy for you not to care about my pride."

Late that night Meg woke because she felt her mother crying. She wasn't making any sound but long shudders stirred the bed.

"Mother," Meg began. "Cousin Julia said you were the loveliest bride she ever saw and then she told me lots about you."

"Your Cousin Julia never liked me." The words were spoken quickly. "She thought your father made a great mistake in marrying me."

"No," Meg said. "That isn't what she thinks. She told me that you'd never let yourself be downed by anything. And she told me that you'd see I wasn't downed; that you'd put me on my feet and get me started."

"Did your Cousin Julia truly say that?"

"Yes," Meg said, "she truly said it. And she said you'd never let me snap at the first chance at marriage."

"I won't," Meg's mother said after she'd been silent for a long, long while. "But I wish that we were safely through the next five years."

✧ PART THREE ✧

COLLEGE

CHAPTER XX

Nobody guessed how scared she was of going to Bryn Mawr. As the time drew near, nobody seemed to sense how terrified she was of leaving home.

For years Meg had heard about Bryn Mawr as the place where she was going to have to go to earn her living. That meant it would be ugly and forbidding; that it would be some bleak and prison-looking institution where she would feel as lost and lonely as Jane Eyre as she went drearily through the routine that taught her how to teach.

Then her mother had kept filling out the queerest documents concerning her as though she had no voice in them.

"Here's Meg's matriculation blank," she'd said. "I'm signing it."

Matriculation blank. It had an awfully personal sound.

Next after reading some fine print, she had put a question, "What's a church affiliation, Whitman?"

When he had explained, she had written out a long word quickly. "There," she had said, "I've put Meg down as being Unitarian."

"Unitarian." That meant being a member of Gid's church. Meg could think of all the times that she had gone with him to Sunday School and had sat through sermons in the Codmans' pew. But only one part of the service had ever made her feel included. That was the part she'd always listened for. "May the peace that passeth understanding . . ." When he reached the point when he said that, Dr. Lord, standing very straight and tall in the high pulpit, uttered the words beautifully, so quietly and beautifully that he stilled the little frets and fusses of the house on Cushing Street. But she had never joined his church.

"I don't believe I am a Unitarian," she had felt called upon to say.

"But," her mother had said, "I've got to put you down as something. I can't let you enter college as a heathen."

To that there wasn't any answer. Meg could remember what it had been like to be teased by other children when she had told them that she was a Darwinian agnostic like her father. She might find herself beset by far worse taunts at college if her mother didn't stretch the truth.

The "social references" had been the first thing attended to, but then there had been the matter of Meg's "health certificate."

"Run down the hill," her mother had said. "I'm sure old Dr. Bogert would love to sign it for you."

That walk Meg had taken as though it was to be for the last time that she would ever see the houses all the length of Congdon Street. For some reason, she had wanted to recall exactly how each one was set close to the sidewalk and how it looked as shut off and inhospitable as a turtle that had drawn all signs of life into its shell.

At last she had passed Hogg's greenhouse where she had gone with her father every fall to get the little feathery ferns he wanted for his Wardian case. She hadn't had to go inside to sense the hot, steamy tropic warmth that was coming from the palms that pressed their topmost leaves against the cloudy panes of glass. The greenhouse was a part of all that she was leaving. So was Blanding's Drug Store on the corner of South Main Street. Every Sunday she had stopped there if she'd gone with her father to the post-office and he still kept up the habit of buying her rock candy with its pure white crystals held together by a string.

But the part of town that led to old Dr. Bogert's office had always been forbidden territory. It was exactly like him, everybody said, to hold his fort no matter what the town did and to force his patients to come trooping to him through the slums.

"Slums," Meg had discovered meant a long line of saloons with swinging doors and with rooming houses on the second story. But at last she'd reached the office in a square brick building and gone in.

"Out" had said the gilt letters on a dark green sign that had been standing on a table and she'd been turning to go home when from another room had come "young" Dr. Bogert. He'd looked

so bronzed with sun and wind that she had felt he shouldn't be indoors.

"If it's not the swimmer," he had said as he'd ushered her into a room that had a big mahogany desk and a swivel chair in front of it. On the wall had been a wooden plaque on which was spread a thin, enormous fish with glistening scales, and around the wall there'd been all sorts of colored pictures of wild game birds and of setter dogs, each holding a dead woodcock in its mouth.

"Young" Dr. Bogert had thought that it was very funny that she had to have a health certificate. "They only need to look at you," he'd said; and then he'd looked at her and she had blushed. Like Mr. Jastrum he, too, disapproved of college, though for other reasons. It ruined a girl's health. There was no sense in treating her as though she was a boy. She was constituted very differently. That, he'd said, he didn't have to tell her. She was old enough to know.

"You don't have to sign," Meg had said indignantly because he had made her feel uncomfortable.

But at that he'd smiled and written down his name to testify that there was nothing wrong about her health. Then they'd both stood up and shaken hands and she had left.

But toiling home up the steep hill, she had wondered why he had the power to make her feel so conscious that she was a girl. Being a girl had seemed to mean that it wasn't going to be her brains—it was her body that was going to count.

That was a thought that was too horrid to reveal to anybody. However, in the midst of all the preparation and confusion it did keep coming back.

In these last days, each person in the family had a new and different way of treating her.

Even Grandpa Simmons, when he knew for sure that she was going to leave the house on Cushing Street, mustered up the courage to break through his silence.

"Does Meg know these people that she's going to live among?" he asked at intervals. He made "these people" sound exactly like some godless heathen tribe in the Old Testament. And when he found out that she didn't know them, and that her mother didn't either, he told her to remember the Mosaic Law. "Meditate upon

it night and morning," he said solemnly. "Never let it pass out of your thoughts and mind."

She didn't have the heart to tell him that she had no idea of what it was or where to find it in the small black Bible he had given her, so she kissed him on a cheek that felt like a soft, emptied leather purse.

Grandmother's way of taking her departure was, Meg found, to go through all her clothes and strengthen all the buttons. "You never know," Grandmother would say most ominously as she measured out a needleful of thread and put a knot in it. "Things happen differently from what's expected." And sometimes she would add, "I guess I'll have to temper down my tongue in dealing with your father." She knew he was the one who would miss Meg most.

That he didn't say so was for fear of breaking down. Meg was aware of that. Instead, he kept giving her the books that he held precious; even his own marked copy of *Don Quixote* and of *Tristram Shandy*; even the Byron that he had owned in college and the chunky little volume of Burns's poems that he had carried through the Civil War.

And all the while, Meg knew that her mother was using precious hours that should be given to the writing of the Bailey-Manly Speller or to preparation of the next day's teaching. Those precious hours were used for the making of new shirtwaists and new dresses. And they weren't at all the sort Jane Eyre would wear while learning how to earn a living. Not one of them was dark and drab.

Of all people in the world, it was her mother who broke down on the last evening. When Meg went to her room to get something, she found her mother with her head down in her arms and with boxes of card-catalogues around her. She was sobbing on the Manly-Bailey desk.

"I can't bear the things I've done to you," she said as Meg came close. "You're the one who's always had to stand things. Ever since you were a little girl, I've let you know about the bill collectors and the strain of never having any money and the risk about the future. You've been the one to keep between your father and your grandmother, and to scour the city for her when she had

a tantrum. I don't know how I could have managed differently, but you've grown up protecting all of us until there's not a thing you don't keep secret just for fear of hurting someone."

Meg had stood beside her thinking how she had kept secret from her any knowledge of the letter that had come fluttering down in the desk drawer. But one thing Meg knew for certain. Mother had meant it when she'd written that she'd never dream of leaving Father or her children. She'd stood by them all and she had managed somehow. She wasn't even vain. She no longer cared about her beauty that people used to speak of. She had dulled it for them by long hours of work.

"I don't mind," Meg said. "I don't mind going off to college."

"You do," her mother answered fiercely. "You hate going. For years you've wanted dreadfully to go to Art School and I wouldn't listen to you. I let Whitman go instead. I've kept forcing you to do the things I've planned."

Meg was struggling in her mind as to how to show some sort of eagerness. To be convincing, at least she'd have to start out honestly.

"I don't believe I want to teach," she said. "I don't believe I'm cut out for a teacher. But maybe I could learn to write, and writing is as good as painting. And if I'm ever going to learn, I've got to meet all sorts of people."

Her mother had stopped crying and was listening to her.

"I've got to meet the kinds," Meg said, "that Grandpa's so afraid of." Then she added, trying to be humorous. "I'm going to meditate upon them night and morning instead of the Mosaic Law."

"You meditate too much," her mother said. "You always have. You've always been my little brood-owl."

But in a short while she was laying plans. "I'd take every course I could," she said. "I'd pitch right in and not miss anything. Then you can write a lot of stories and your brother will do the illustrations for them."

Deep in her heart, Meg knew that for anything she wrote, she didn't want an illustration. But about that she didn't say a word.

On the day she left, it was Gid who saw her off because her mother had to teach in Boston and because her father couldn't

bear to go down to the station. He would rather say good-bye in their own house.

At the last he didn't have much time even for that; for when the Codman carriage drew up to the curb, Gid at once was very busy taking out her bags. He wouldn't let the coachman do it. Then he was the one who kept her father busy shaking hands with him repeatedly. Then once that she and Gid were driving off down Cushing Street, he kept waving back at the front windows as though he himself were leaving too.

"If you were your brother," he said sternly after they had turned the corner. "If you were your brother, your mother would never let you travel all the way to Philadelphia alone."

"That's because," Meg said, "my mother knows that I can't happen on a Jessamine or a Flossie or a Myrtle."

"You can happen on a Lionel," Gid said. "Or you can happen on some nasty rich old man. I wish I could get off from college. I wish that I could go along with you."

After the trunks were checked, he presented Meg with a green ticket.

"That's your Pullman seat," he said quite crossly.

"But I don't want a Pullman seat . . ."

"This time it doesn't matter what you want." He spoke so firmly that she had to let him have his way.

When at last the train had snorted in and come to a full stop below the shed, he carried her two bags on board and tipped the colored porter with a dollar bill and saw her seated in a green plush chair.

"You're to stay right where you are and not go wandering off into the common coach for fun," he said.

"Why would it be for fun?" Meg asked.

"Because you don't mind grit or soot or commonness if you can sit beside a person who will talk to you. Your mother ought to worry over you." Then his voice changed. "Meg," he said, and he was gone as quickly as he had gone years ago when he had once called her "Meg" and shinned the Maxceys' fence.

As the train began to gather speed and chug away, she waved to him, but he only nodded back to her. He was standing on the platform with his head up, and he was looking very unconcerned

as though she was some stranger whom from politeness merely, he was seeing off.

CHAPTER XXI

All the way to Philadelphia, a new terrifying knowledge had kept dawning on Meg. At Bryn Mawr, nobody was going to know a single thing about her family. And no matter what, in Providence people did know who they were. With all their ups and downs, she had depended on them. Now she was going to have to stand alone.

"I'll be nobody but me," she had kept thinking as the train had throbbed and rattled on its way. The thought had made her feel as single and alone as she had sometimes felt on a high diving board before she took a plunge through space. But she knew how to dive and when she struck the water, she knew how to swim. There was nothing that she knew about the way to act in any place that wasn't Providence. On the few occasions when she'd been away from it, she had gone with her father and had been Professor Bailey's daughter. Here there wouldn't be a soul to help.

At first she had been sure that she'd changed to a wrong train and arrived at the wrong place.

If this was where she was to learn to earn her living, then Bryn Mawr shouldn't be so beautiful. In a way it was more beautiful than any place she'd ever seen. But it didn't seem quite real. Its casement windows with their leaded, diamond panes, its groined, dusky arches and its rounded turrets made it look exactly like stage scenery; like Elizabethan scenery. Meg could see her father singling out the tower in which the two little princes had been murdered by their royal uncle and choosing the portal where King Henry had appeared in majesty and been so rude to poor brash Falstaff. He would go around the campus picking out the backdrop for all of his pet scenes from Shakespeare. But he would agree with her, she felt, that English scenery was only right for English people. Not that it would do to say that she

preferred colleges like Harvard or like Brown that looked American. To be American, she had discovered quickly, was to be barbaric and uncultivated. It was enough to make a person dreadfully ashamed of using certain words and speaking certain others as she'd always heard them spoken. And no matter what her father thought, there wasn't any native literature. Poe perhaps. Just possibly. But not Emerson or Thoreau. And surely not Walt Whitman or Mark Twain.

Not that she had been aware of much of this at first. There had been her room-mate, Anna Buxton, to get used to. She had been already in possession when Meg had reached the suite they were to share in Merion. Over the small brick fireplace, Anna had nailed a banner that said Chapel Hill and she had hung groups of pictures on the high tan walls.

The very minute that Anna had shaken hands and spoken, Meg had wanted dreadfully to laugh at the thought of what was happening to her. So then she was going to get mixed up with Southerners, with that unknown race of people whom Grandma Simmons so detested and who had led the Senator to sin.

On the night of Meg's arrival, it had really seemed as though a life of wild temptation was before her. No sooner had she stowed her luggage in a tiny bedroom than Anna had spoken in a deep, rich voice that had sounded like a colored person's.

"You-all ever heard of muscatel up North?" she'd asked.

"Yes," Meg had answered. At once she had thought about the Jastrums' lavish dinner table and been glad that she could sound so knowing. "I guess," she'd said, "that muscatel's about my favorite kind of wine."

"Then you-all can have a little drink with me," Anna had continued quickly. "My mother makes it from our grapes. She let me have a dozen bottles to bring up y'here to college. I can't offer it to anyone but you. That's because you are my room-mate. That's the way it's set down in the Self-Gov rules."

As they had sat down in their study and eyed each other over thick glass bedroom tumblers that had looked as though they had been filled with liquid topaz, Meg had thought about Jane Eyre. Anna with her light, big yellow pompadour and humorous face was nobody that a Brontë sister would have roomed with.

Even to have met her would have changed the sombre gloom of any novel that the Brontës wrote.

"Except for Radnor, we've landed in the tackiest hall in the whole college," Anna had explained before they'd gone to bed. "We'll be known as being tacky too if we don't work hard at being popular."

But at dancing school when Meg had worked hard at being popular she had ended up by getting the fattest boy in Providence as her partner for the German. Even on the first night, Anna had made her miserable and panicky by the time they'd gone to bed.

From then on, Meg had gone on meeting girls and girls and girls, all clad in long black academic gowns which was a custom, so it seemed, that Bryn Mawr had acquired from Oxford. "I've gone and got me to a nunnery," she had thought of writing to her father, but she had been afraid that her mother might be hurt.

Then because Anna had told her that she must be popular, she had attended big class meetings and had sat cross-legged on a crowded floor and learned to shout out cheers in Greek and Welsh and English. She had even written the class song that she was now so dreadfully ashamed of.

"Shoulder to shoulder,"
voices had sung out in loud chorus.

"Shoulder to shoulder, tossed mid doubt and fear,
"With rhythmic tread, and dim but flashing eyes,
"We kneel . . ."

To her utter horror, Meg had listened to words that she herself had written and had struggled to her feet.

"It's all wrong," she'd shouted. "You can't kneel and tread at the same time. I've got to write it over."

But nobody had paid the least attention to her. The girls had liked the song the way it was. They wouldn't let her change it. And when she'd got back to her suite in Merion, Anna had been cross with her. "You didn't have to go and make a jay-bird of yourself," she'd said.

All the same her doing so had brought her her first friend, Carola Woerishoffer. It was she who had sought Meg out and

with her, she had brought a catalogue with a gray cover and had said that it was time to plan the courses that they meant to take.

"I know exactly what I'm after," Carola had announced. And certainly she had looked as though she did. She had green eyes that were as clear as marbles and a scar across her forehead that changed the arch of one dark eyebrow. She had a nose that was inquisitive and a thin, fierce, twisted mouth and a way of rubbing her hands palmwise when she was excited. "I know," she had repeated, "exactly what I'm going to take."

"So do I. It's English Composition," Meg had said.

"That's so that you won't ever write again of kneeling and of treading both at the same time," Carola had laughed. "Well, what I came to learn about is Economics."

"Economics" was a word that Meg had never heard of; and first Carola had explained that it had to do with things called "sweatshops."

"I don't believe that they have sweatshops in Rhode Island," Meg could remember having said. But Carola had been sure they did and that they had bad tenement conditions and child labor.

While Carola had talked about bad tenement conditions, Meg had thought about the darling little mill houses out at Adamsville. The half story at the top and the pitched roof and the two very tiny windows at the front had made them more adorable to look at. So had the well-sweep in each yard. So even had the little out-houses. And while Carola talked about child labor, Meg had thought of how she'd been so used to seeing children tending looms or being bobbin boys that she'd taken their working in the mills all day for granted.

"And I suppose I'll have to learn to handle vice, vice and white slavery," Carola had continued. "When women get the vote, they'll put an end to red-light districts."

"Red-light districts" had made Meg think of Roger Williams Park when there were fireworks. But what they were, Carola wouldn't say when she had found Meg didn't know about "white slavery."

"It's enough for you to know that I mean to give my life to Labor," Carola'd said; and her voice had been so fervent that it had seemed silly to speak of a desire to learn to write.

However, it had been Carola, not Dean Madison, who had truly planned Meg's college course.

"We can't be together," she had said, "in English Composition. They divide the whole class alphabetically and they'll put me in another group. And you haven't got the kind of mind that would be good at Economics. But we've both got to get our General Science over with. Don't let's cut up frogs. Let's go in for Geology. There'll be lots of field trips where we have a chance to talk. They can't keep us chipping rocks, not the whole blooming time."

Anna hadn't thought much of their plans. "Freshman English, we've all got to take," she had admitted. "But everybody takes Biology. That's because Professor Tommy Morgan teaches it. He's the handsomest man on the whole faculty and he isn't married either. Not that he's allowed to talk to us outside of classes, but he can speak to us in Lab."

Other than the two subjects she had mentioned, Anna was in search of one snap course. What's more, she had announced that Carola didn't mean it when she said she meant to give her life to labor problems. She was the richest girl in the whole college. She was an heiress who'd had millions left her by her father and they were her very own to spend.

Anna had talked so much about Carola's millions which surely didn't show in anything she wore or in her big single room that was furnished with plain mission furniture, that Meg began to shy away.

"I don't believe I could be friends with a millionairess." Carola at last had forced her to explain.

"Don't be a damn fool," was what Carola had answered. No girl whom Meg had known had ever sworn, not even Mildred Jastrum, who was fond of shocking people. But Carola's words had shown that it was her scorn and not her money of which a person had to be afraid.

Except for making friends with her, Meg knew that there wasn't any use pretending that she fitted here at college. A month had almost passed and she had gone on fitting less and less so that it was hard to write a Sunday letter home.

"I adore this place," she had just written down as her first sentence.

That was a good lie for a starter. There was nothing she adored about it, not even the arches and the towers and turrets that made it, everybody said, a replica of Oxford. Why did it have to be a replica of Oxford? Why couldn't it be like Brown that had started off with two old colonial brick buildings and then kept adding any kind of architecture that was being built right at the moment so that the campus told a long, continuous story? If parts of it were ugly, they were ugly with an awful and straightforward honesty. They weren't pretending to be British. They belonged.

Mildly Meg liked the view from Merion across the whole wide sweep of campus. And she did like to wander in the nearby woods where the crowded trees rose very slim and tall and sifted down dark, russet leaves until they drifted deep across the paths and hid the little burial ground way at the very center. And on these late October days, she liked to walk down the Gulf Road that had rough gullies at each side and a light undergrowth of dogwood that was dotted with white button buds that would uncloseth next spring.

But she missed Gid. She missed him dreadfully. If she were only home, this was the very kind of weather when they took a trolley car way out into the country and set forth on a tramp.

Here at Bryn Mawr, nobody walked for fun. They never went unless they had to make up exercise which they could register. To go for any other reason, Anna said, simply meant that you weren't being popular and were turning out to be "a freak," which was the worst thing you could be.

"Every afternoon I go down to the Athletic Field," Meg added to her letter. That at least was true though she could imagine how her father would lift up his eyebrows when he read it. "I'm learning to play hockey."

Certainly she had tried to learn for part of one whole dreadful afternoon. She had tried to be a guard and to stop a hard black ball from spinning past her legs and shooting in between two high white posts. But the end had been so shameful that she hated still to think about it. She could still hear Miss Appleby, the coach, who was very British, and who wore a very short blue tunic and was everywhere at once.

"Bailey," she had called as though Meg were a man. "Bailey,

get up on the bank and join the cheering section. Don't clutter up the field for us."

Never again would Meg clutter up the field for anyone. But she did have to sit among the girls who cheered and cheered. Anna said that was the least a girl could do to show she had some college spirit. And every afternoon, Meg put on her green flannel blouse and her green corduroy skirt and trooped down the hill with everybody else and stayed till games were over. She did it every single day.

"There are lots of girls I like." Meg put that down to please her mother, who needn't know that Carola was the only friend she'd made.

But there were so many girls whom she didn't understand at all. They hadn't come to college as she had to learn to earn a living. And they hadn't come to college as Carola had to study about something that she meant to give her life to. They were here because they liked to run big noisy meetings and to call for ballot votes and to talk about a thing called parliamentary law. They were the ones who had been elected officers already and were spoken of as "fine material" and referred to as the ones who'd leave a mark.

Being popular was different. That, Anna said, was awfully easy. It meant knowing everyone except those whom she called "kind of tacky" and it meant using their small study as a meeting place where she said she warmed things up by singing Negro songs and telling Negro stories and doing what she called "her stunts."

"Our study is always jam-pack full of girls," Meg wrote. It was. They came because of Anna. Nobody could be funnier. But when Meg worked, she worked in Carola's tower room in Denbigh. In her own place were girls who thought it was too bad that Anna had her for a room-mate. It was tough luck to draw a room-mate who was turning out to be a "grind" and such an awful prig.

It wasn't that Anna hadn't done her very best to help.

"You could get an awful crush on some one in an upper class," she had advised. "Then when you went off mooning through the woods, you'd have some reason for it and you'd seem a lot more human. Wait till the Sophs give *D'Arcy of the Guards*. The Freshmen all get desperate crushes on the hero."

But *D'Arcy of the Guards* had come and gone; and all that Meg had seen had been a girl who'd swaggered on the stage in men's high boots and tight white satin breeches and a scarlet coat that was too tight or loose in all of the wrong places. Once the play was over, Freshmen begged to be allowed to take her books to classes for her. They besieged her on the Board Walk or in Taylor Hall and begged her for the chance to run one errand for her. They lurked behind the evergreens till she went by. Then out they jumped at her and barred her way so that she had to speak.

Meg had tried it once to know just how it felt, but even though she'd been rewarded with a smile, she hadn't felt at all the way she'd felt when "young" Dr. Bogert had smiled at her in the big ugly room at Little Compton or later in his office. She'd been just another girl, clumsy and embarrassed but not truly scared. Dr. Bogert had made her conscious of a kind of risk, a deep excitement about being altogether different from a man.

Rather than think of that she had better finish up her letter.

"Carola's my best friend," she started off with a new paragraph.

"She's awfully nice although she's rich. She doesn't mind my being poor and having such a small allowance. When we do anything together, we go Dutch treat because she says that's safer in a friendship. Last week I'd saved enough to go in town to Philadelphia and see a matinee and we sat in the third balcony. Carola didn't mind the balcony although she said the play was awful bosh. It was Pinero's *Gay Lord Quex* and I thought that it was simply wonderful, though Carola doesn't. But that's because we like such different things. She likes tenement conditions and all sorts of labor problems and she's going to learn to handle vice. She says she's had too much of drawing rooms and means to work for the down-trodden. She's not like anyone I've ever met. Remember the story that I wrote when I pretended that I was an heiress? Well, Carola is an heiress, but you'd never guess it."

That was enough. Meg had filled the page and she need only write "With love" and sign her name.

Quickly she had taken out another sheet. She didn't have to stop to think about this letter.

"Dear Gid," she had begun.

"Mostly I hate this awful place. Nobody goes to walk; and when they do, they don't know how to do it. They turn it into exercise or else they call it 'hiking.' If it's hiking, they have to reach some special goal and then they turn around and come right back again. They've never learned that walking's as much fun as dancing.

"Could you go out to Cat's Swamp and just pretend I was along with you? And if you do, please find a hamamelis tree in bloom. Remember how we liked that name for it much better than we liked witch-hazel? Here no one would know that it was the only bush that blossomed in October; and if they did, they wouldn't notice it. They don't pay attention to the kind of things we used to search for. I don't believe they'd even stop to look at a fringed gentian . . ."

Suppose the letter mostly was remembering. Gid wouldn't care. He'd like it. And here she didn't share a recollection with a single other person. That was the very worst about Bryn Mawr.

CHAPTER XXII

Lab was over for the afternoon. All the other girls had left, but Meg hadn't finished something that she wished to know about because it was exciting.

"Please may I stay?" she had asked Professor Bascom and had looked up only long enough to see her nod.

Now that the light was getting dim, Meg had to stop her work and for the first time she noticed that her professor had moved over and was sitting near her.

"You use a microscope," said Miss Bascom, "as though you'd always used one."

"No," Meg said. "That comes from watching. It was the one thing in my father's study that I couldn't touch."

"There was Jacob Whitman Bailey years ago," Miss Bascom said. "Are you by any chance related to him?"

"Yes," Meg said. "He was my grandfather. He lived up at West Point. He gave my father his first start in science."

"He was a great geologist." Miss Bascom spoke as though she shouldn't be the first to say so. Then she asked, "Was he the reason why you chose to take the subject?"

She looked so honest that anyone would have to answer honestly. "No," Meg confessed. "I never even thought of him or Father. I knew that there were field trips and I like to walk. But most of all, I did want to take one subject with Carola Woerishoffer. You see we thought we'd have a lot of time to talk. There are so many things we'd like to talk about."

Miss Bascom wasn't cross, for she was smiling.

"Where was your friend, Carola," she was saying, "that day when you got lost and left behind way at the bottom of the quarry? She wasn't with you, was she?"

"No," Meg said. "I was alone. I didn't know that everybody'd gone."

Back came the recollection of a glimmer in the dusk way down below the daylight; then the hard-edged perfect outlines of a small quartz crystal that was sure and perfect. If somebody hadn't scuffed away a little drift of earth, it would have gone about its slow mysterious business with not a soul the wiser. That was one reason why it had seemed so wonderful. Unseen, it had fulfilled some rule that governed it below the surface of the earth.

"It's not often," Miss Bascom's voice was saying, "that a student comes my way who's really interested in crystallography. You're the first one in some time. Suppose I let you have a key so that you could come and work here when you felt like it. Do you think you'd ever use it?"

"Yes," Meg said. "I would. I'd use it often." Then she had an afterthought. "Maybe though, it's only fair to tell you that most of all I want to learn to write."

To Meg, Miss Bascom looked the way her own father looked when nobody showed the slightest interest in one of his experiments.

"I took the trouble to hunt up your marks," Miss Bascom said, "and you aren't doing half so well in English."

"No," Meg heard herself admitting. "Nobody likes my themes. 'Provincial' is what they always write across the top of them. But maybe I'll write better when I'm sure of what that means."

"Crystals aren't provincial. You wouldn't have that trouble with them," Miss Bascom stated tersely.

"I'd like to come and study them. I'll use my key. Only . . ." Meg knew she must sound rude. "Only you see I've had so much of science in the family that I think if you don't mind, I'd like to learn to write."

She was being silly. She didn't need to have Miss Bascom tell her so. There was nothing that she'd seen in her whole life that held the slightest interest for Miss Marsh, the teacher of her own division. She had never been to England. She had never travelled anywhere except from one end of Rhode Island to the other and what Miss Marsh wanted was what she called in a vague way "the continental scene." But when she'd asked for "local color," Meg had tried as faithfully as she knew how to do the Seaburys' boardinghouse at Little Compton. That hadn't worked nor had her attempt at "social background" even though she'd done the Jastrums' house at Adamsville with all its lavishness and splendor. For that matter she couldn't even seem to write a pure description. No one wished to read about the Maxceys' yard with its old cherry trees and tangle of neglected roses or about Cat Swamp or the garden out at Hillwood or the Homestead out at Simmonsville. All the papers that she read, Miss Marsh handled languidly as though she meant to show the class how far they were beneath her notice. But it was still worse, Meg felt, not to have them even touched in public and to get them back with the one word "provincial." Each time that was written at the top in a fine slanting script.

This time, though, Miss Marsh had given out a subject that hadn't seemed to mean a thing at first. "The real, right place." Surely there wasn't only one. But among all those that made Meg homesick just to think about the realest and rightest had been Cousin Julia's on a day in early fall.

Certainly Meg had meant to do it justice. If she had failed, it was because she hadn't words for the different symmetry of trees that suddenly were leafless. With all their foliage gone, the elms still had a soar and arch that curved into a droop. The hornbeams had a thrust of stiff, fierce branches. The oaks reached calmly out as though they owned the earth. The buttonwoods soared up,

but in their soaring, they spread out like candelabra, their white candles clotted with black wicks. And among them were small groves of saplings that were each springing up according to its kind.

In writing, she had drawn on all her father had made her notice about form and texture, but half-heartedly she'd dropped her theme into the black tin box in Taylor Hall. If it wasn't good enough to get a comment, then she'd have to change to crystals and working doubly hard at Lab.

But she wouldn't learn her fate till after this big General Meeting. Only the best themes were read now. Miss Hoyt read them. She was a terrifying person who scuttled by the students on the campus, wearing a black-and-white plaid suit and a hat dipped down above her eyes, and a veil dotted with enormous spots. Although she wasn't lame and didn't need it, she carried a stout cane.

Right now she had come into the crowded lecture room and was standing up behind the rostrum in her academic gown that had black flowing sleeves. She had bright hair that was the color of a marigold. It was parted in the front and done up in back in braids that were covered with a coarse black fishnet. On her short, uptilted nose, she wore a pair of eyeglasses that were rimmed with heavy tortoise shell and attached to a black grosgrain ribbon that kept dangling. At the moment, she was puckering her heavy, tawny eyebrows and was glancing at a paper that she was holding in her hand that was adorned with heavy silver rings.

"Is Miss Bailey in the room?" she asked suddenly in a high-pitched, fretful voice.

"Yes, Miss Hoyt, I'm here," Meg said. At last one of her themes had been passed on from her own division. That meant that it was good enough to read to the whole General Class.

Tense with excitement she had answered and was listening to Miss Hoyt, who was saying,

"I have your magnum opus and I see that you have called it 'Fall.' Did you think by any chance that was a word included in the Oxford Dictionary?"

"They use it where I come from," Meg was stammering while she felt her cheeks flame. "They always use it in Rhode Island."

"So then," Miss Hoyt said; and with a man's big handkerchief

she seemed to brush her nose up even higher. "So then if the poet Keats had had the mishap to be born in your Rhode Island, he would have had to write an 'Ode to Fall' and not an 'Ode to Autumn'? Do you think that with that title even his poetic genius could have pulled off a great poem?"

This that she was listening to, Meg knew, was ridicule; the one weapon that her father said there was never an excuse for. She knew, too, that she was very angry. She had risen to her feet and she felt that there was no one in the room except Miss Hoyt and her.

"A Rhode Islander," she said, "when he says 'Fall,' isn't talking about autumn. Autumn's the whole season. Keats said so right in his first line. 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,' he said. In his title he used the only word he could for what he meant."

"You're very kind to grant him that," Miss Hoyt laughed and there was a titter round the room. "And may I ask what a Rhode Islander does mean by his provincialism?"

So that was what that strange word meant. It meant knowing your own state and knowing it in every time of year and in the uplands and the lowlands.

"Fall's not the whole long season," Meg began. "Sometimes it lasts a week and sometimes just one night. It comes suddenly with a clear night and a black frost and it's only the short time when things are dropping. Sometimes, overnight, the trees lose all their leaves in one big clutter. Chestnut burrs spring open and nuts rattle down without having to be shaken. It's swift, and when it comes there isn't time for all the ripening things Keats wrote about."

By the time she had finished, Meg was aware that Miss Hoyt was looking at her very differently. There was nothing brusque or unkind in her manner as she leaned her arms down on the desk and spoke.

"You have drawn a fine distinction between words, Miss Bailey," she was saying, "and never mind the Oxford Dictionary. But pray may I ask why you don't write the way you talk?"

"I don't talk very much," Meg said, "I never do unless . . ."

"Unless," Miss Hoyt finished off, "unless someone has roused

your temper. How would it be if I took you into my division and promised that I'd make you quarrel with me?"

Quarrels were important. Meg could remember how Gid had a way of saying so and how nobody bothered over having one with somebody who didn't matter. All the same it seemed the queerest way of learning.

"Would a quarrel make me learn to write?" she asked.

"We could try it," was Miss Hoyt's answer. "You're to hand your next theme in to me and it's to be about Rhode Island."

Then she went on reading themes.

But later as Meg was standing on the gray stone steps of Taylor Hall, Miss Hoyt stopped her for a moment.

"You might," she said, "come down to tea with me some afternoon at Low Buildings."

"I'd like to come," Meg said.

When she got home for lunch in Merion, the girls in her own hall all jeered at her.

"Now you're an English shark," they said. "Now you'll have to start in getting awfully queer and thinking up a pose and carrying a cane about the campus."

"I'll bet I don't," Meg said, but all the same she had the sense of high adventure. Some day Miss Hoyt might really ask her down for tea and set the hour and day for coming.

"Where's Low Buildings?" Meg asked Carola later.

"Oh," Carola said. "It's where the women on the faculty all live. At least the ones who can afford to. They live in pairs. They're what are called affinities. They don't like men. They think that men are awfully coarse and vulgar. They think they've found a better way of life."

CHAPTER XXIII

Meg was never tired of looking around Carola's room because it had a few real paintings and they weren't the least bit like the work of Troyon and Daubigny and all the other Barbizons whom she had been brought up to admire. True, she had only seen their

work in soft, brown photographs, but they only seemed to care for hoary willows and pale pools or a group of cattle on a hilltop or a pack of sheep watched over by a solitary shepherd and huddling through a lane.

Carola's paintings were exciting. She said that she had picked them up herself in Paris for a song and that they were all things that a Salon critic wouldn't look at. But Meg had never been to Paris and had never heard about a Salon critic and she was entranced.

One was a little picture of a picnic by a man named Renoir; and it was much gayer than any picnic Meg had ever seen in Roger Williams Park. The sunlight falling through the trees was much more yellowy. Men were lolling on the vivid grass in brighter clothes than men would dare to wear in Providence, and women in little tilted hats and bright striped dresses sprawled as though they'd never heard of sitting properly. They had been eating food from a big straw hamper and drinking wine from bottles that they'd emptied and left overturned.

Another painting by a man named Monet was of a single pond lily, ivory and waxy green and deep blue in the shadows that marked the way it opened, curve on curve. It made Meg know how wrong she'd been in crowding a whole fistful of smooth buds into the heavy toothmug of her washstand down at Little Compton and how much more beautiful the petals were when the bloom unfolded by itself.

"You like them more than I do. Why don't you take one to your room?" Carola had asked.

Then when Meg had stated simply that she couldn't ever borrow, Carola had called her a born New England prig and added, "I'm glad I've got Semitic blood."

Semitic blood. That made her come from some strange foreign race that was left out of the usual history books. Yet no matter what Carola said, she made it plain that she liked a girl the better for having only things that were her own.

At the moment, clad in her green gym suit which she preferred to any other garb, Carola was sitting on her burlap-covered couch, cross-legged. The person she was really talking to was Comfort Dorsey, who had very fine and soft dun-colored hair and a very

soft, slow Southern drawl that barely made her lips move. In her own room she kept a pair of waltzing mice whose incessant motion didn't bother her, Carola said, because she saw them slowly. And she kept thinking philosophic thoughts that were so misty and so vague that even when she got them into words, Meg didn't understand them. They had a lot to do with somebody called Marx. When his name was mentioned, it was wiser to keep still.

"Society," Meg heard Carola say, "should have a thorough overhauling."

She could use the word "society" a hundred times, but to Meg it would still mean Cousin Cora reading social items from the newspapers and discussing people who were "in" enough to give exclusive parties and others who were "out."

"Roosevelt was absolutely right about one thing," Carola's voice was saying. "There shouldn't be great corporations with the power to raise price levels. They shouldn't be allowed to build up a high tariff wall against the goods of any foreign country."

But sound business men like Mr. Jastrum believed in a high tariff wall. Hadn't Meg heard him say that, luckily for everyone, Senator Aldrich meant to make it even higher? It was nonsense for a girl to think that she knew more than men did. Even she herself was sure of that.

"What's more," Carola said, "the Government should seize and own the railroads."

What? Own the New York, New Haven that ran its main line and its little branch lines through Rhode Island? That was silly.

"It's got to be the way it is," said Meg, "or what would happen to the widows?"

"Widows?" Carola didn't seem to think they had a thing to do with the whole question. But they did. Meg could count up those right in the Bailey family and others that she knew about.

"Husbands always leave their widows railroad stock," she started to explain. "Professors like my father can't afford them, but other husbands are supposed to buy up all the shares they can in the New Haven. They're called gilt-edge securities and when they're left in an estate then women never have to worry. They can keep up their places and go on living right in the same style."

"That's swank and bosh and loot," was what she heard Carola say.

Suppose, Meg wondered, just suppose that she should talk about the "passes" that Mildred Jastrum loved to give to all her friends and that made the trainmen act with a politeness that was very special. Carola would be sure to call them "graft," which was a word she loved to use.

For the moment she had finished with the railroads and had passed on to another subject.

"All public utilities should be state owned," she said. "Just take the telephone."

Meg could think back to a time when she had had to cross the street and go into the Browns' big, gloomy house "to take the telephone." It had been fixed to the wall in a dark box out in the butler's pantry and had had a horrid little handle that she'd had to spin and spin before she'd heard more than a sputtering of senseless noise. All the same, some of the first tests for the telephone had been conducted out at Hillwood. And the Baileys, at least all the rich ones, had sat round a table and consulted and decided that they'd "plunge." "While," Meg could hear her mother add, "there was your own father right outside the window in the garden, *plunging* around collecting weeds."

Meg sat thinking of that lovely garden with its maze of box that began to give off a delicious smell the moment a warm sun had dried away the silvery cobwebs that were spun like cradles in each pocket. She was remembering how the saucy little Johnny-jump-ups sprang up anywhere they chose in the very middle of the formal walks when she was conscious of Carola talking of the way she meant to live.

The very moment she got through college, she was going to live down in a settlement house. Queer, how the very moment anyone said "down," it made Meg think of slums; slums like the ones she'd seen on the way to Dr. Bogert's office. "Down" apparently was where a settlement house should be. Carola spoke of it as though it would be full of foreigners and awfully grubby. Why did she want to live there? Besides, there was a reason why she shouldn't.

"You can't go off and take a job," Meg said, "unless you

need to earn a living. Pretending that you're poor enough to have to work's a kind of cheating."

Carola's face had turned bright red.

"You don't suppose," she said, "that I would take a salary."

"Even if you didn't," Meg insisted, "you'd be filling someone's place. Besides," she added, "you told me that your mother lives alone. You can't go off and leave her."

At this remark, Carola was rubbing her hands palmwise. "Can't I?" She laughed delightedly. "The last time I saw my mother she told me that I only used her house as a convenience. I explained that living with her was the most inconvenient thing I did."

Imagine thinking such a thought of the brown double-house on Cushing Street. In comparison Meg knew that it was worn and shabby. But in some way it was dear to everyone who lived in it. Even to Grandpa Simmons and to Grandmother. And her father's study up on the third floor, Meg knew he loved not only for the furnishings inside but for the elm boughs close against his windows. Nowhere else would he be happy. Nor had she heard her mother speak of wanting any better place to live in than the one she had contrived to make so comfortable and gay.

As for Meg herself, she wanted dreadfully to be there at this very moment. Even when she got back to her room, it didn't seem her own. More than half of it was filled with Anna's things and they were the banners and the photographs and the new shiny furniture and morris chairs of someone who was popular. The things Meg owned looked dingy in comparison. They belonged to someone who as a room-mate was a detriment and who was turning out to be a freak.

She had even lost the feeling of excitement that she had when she cut across the campus and started down the long boardwalk that led to Low Buildings. Part of the excitement came from the fact that Miss Hoyt never truly stopped her hurried course to give an invitation. "You might try to find me in this afternoon," she'd say, dashing by like the Red Queen in *Alice* and sounding as though the chances were that she'd be out.

Having tea with her in the past months had taken on a meaning that was very special. Meg had come to love the cluttered,

crowded room that was papered with a pattern of bright pink and blue and lavender hydrangeas and that had a wasteful wood fire burning. The magazines that sprawled in every chair were French, not *Littell's* or the *Atlantic Monthly*. And on the desk was a delightful litter. There was thin, gray writing paper in quires that were half-used and there were sticks of sealing wax and a round pewter inkstand that bristled with long quills. Moreover, Meg had learned to swallow down the bitter brew called "Smoky Souchon" and to ask for milk, not cream, since cream was still another thing that was provincial. And she had grown to be content with bread cut in the thinnest slices. Most of all, she liked the lingering fumes of cigarette smoke and the smell of some strange perfume that would be aired out of any parlor that she knew in Providence. She could stand a lot of teasing just to be allowed to sit demurely in her wicker basket chair and feel that she was on the threshold of a world that she had met only in books.

But this afternoon for once, Miss Hoyt wasn't making fun of her for what she called her bread-and-butter mind. Miss Hoyt's face had lost its impishness and though her eyebrows had their usual pucker, her eyes and mouth were kind.

"My child," she said, "suppose you put your teacup down and try to tell me what's the matter."

"I wish that I was home," Meg stammered out. "When my father talks, I understand him; and he isn't stupid. But here at Bryn Mawr I never understand a single word that anybody ever says to me. Only when Miss Bascom talks to me about quartz crystals and makes sense."

Meg felt she couldn't speak about Carola and how she planned to live down in the slums and leave her mother. No matter what Carola did, she was a friend. It was easier to turn to English where, for any other Reader but Miss Hoyt, Meg was continually baffled by the comments on her papers.

"I got a story back," she said. "It was about Nathaniel Herreshoff, the blind boat-builder down at Bristol. He can't see a single thing and yet he builds the Cup Defenders. He designs them for the race against Sir Thomas Lipton, and they win. But his brother has to make the actual model. Then he puts it in the

blind man's hands and lets him feel the swiftness of a yacht that he won't ever see."

"What did your teacher have to say about the story?" asked Miss Hoyt.

"She only wrote on it, 'The Master would have made this far more quintessential.'" Then Meg added, "I looked up quintessential in the dictionary. But if it means the 'utter essence' I don't see how even Christ could make it more so."

"He couldn't," said Miss Hoyt. "Not even He. But whatever made you think of Christ?"

"I thought," Meg said, "I thought He was the Master. That's what I've heard religious people call Him."

"At Bryn Mawr," Miss Hoyt said, "The Master stands for Henry James."

For a long time she sat laughing, but she explained that she was laughing at something that she called pure pose and affectation.

"There's no earthly reason," she remarked, "why you should have read a book by Henry James at your age."

"But I have," Meg said. "I've read *What Maisie Knew*. I read it years and years ago."

"And you're what age now?" Miss Hoyt asked.

"I'm seventeen," Meg said. "But when I was thirteen or maybe twelve I found that story in our attic. It came out 'continued' in *The Chap Book* and it was a magazine my mother thought too good to throw away. On rainy days I used to climb the attic stairs and sit on the bare boards and read it. I got awfully interested in Maisie."

"But, my child,"—Miss Hoyt seemed very sure—"you couldn't come within a million miles of understanding her."

"I did understand her," Meg protested. "I skipped a lot about the older characters because they didn't act like people in my family and I remember that I got so tired of the way they kept on getting married. But I did know the way that Maisie felt when she didn't let them know how much she knew about them."

"She was an awful little horror of sophistication," said Miss Hoyt.

"No," Meg said. "She was only trying hard to keep things smooth."

Suddenly Miss Hoyt seemed very tired of Maisie. She was doing

what she'd never done before and asking questions about life on Cushing Street. And Meg was trying hard to choose her answers. It seemed important to make her father seem proud and adored and masterful and to make her mother seem quite feminine and gentle.

"Why," Miss Hoyt broke in, "did your mother ever think that you were old enough to send away to college?"

"Because," Meg said, "she knew I'd get through all the sooner. Then I could start to earn my living earlier. At first my mother thought I'd have to learn to be a teacher. She thought that a Bryn Mawr degree would help me get a good position. But she doesn't mind my trying hard to learn to write."

For a long while Miss Hoyt sat quite still, which was queer, since usually she was so restless, but finally she spoke.

"I couldn't ever write," she'd said. "I've got the wits to know that. What I have is what is called a brilliant mind. It flashes sparks and sets off fireworks, but except for teaching, it hasn't really any use. I wouldn't know about your mind except that it's not brilliant. And when I say that, you mustn't think I mean to be unkind. For all I know you have something other. You do have the funniest sense of people and of how each person talks so that you give them individuality. The trouble is, you haven't seen so very many, have you? You've gone round and round in one small circle. What you need is broadening. Can't you ever travel anywhere and get outside of your Rhode Island?"

At that Meg brightened.

"Oh, yes," she said. "This summer I am going to travel. It was a promise if I passed my mid-years. My father's going to take me off to see his birthplace."

"Where, may I ask, is that?" Miss Hoyt said.

"It's at West Point," Meg said. "I'm to be there a whole month instead of going down the Narragansett Bay. That ought to broaden me a little."

"For that purpose it's the last place in the world," Miss Hoyt said. "Flirtation Walk, cadets, and belle buttons. That's all you'll find except an Army marriage. But perhaps that is the happiest ending for a child who knew what Maisie knew when she was twelve."

CHAPTER XXIV

Her father wasn't well when Meg had come home from Bryn Mawr in June. He had had to cut some of his classes or to let his first assistant handle them. Still that hadn't meant that they weren't going to have their trip.

"He's the poorest traveller in the world," her mother had said. "He always thinks that any train he takes is headed for Schenectady or some strange place that isn't even on the schedule. But if you can only land him at West Point, it's sure to brace him up."

And she had been only less concerned for Meg.

"You'll have to manage for yourself," her mother had warned. "You'll have to use your own discretion. I can't see your father as a chaperon. He thinks an army uniform can turn a man into the soul of honor. Don't let yourself be taken in by that."

All the same, Meg knew that her mother had wanted her to have the kind of time that she was having with dates for hops and walks and concerts and every chance to use the dresses that had been copied from shop windows down in Boston. And though her Cousin Belle had told her that she'd meet Tom, Dick, and Harry and not men of any family or background, that haughty lady had given her a parasol that turned into a taut silk tent of lilac taffeta and a tulle hat with lilac flowers to match and a white flannel tailored suit.

The first hop in Cullum Hall had been more scary than any dance that Meg had ever been to. She hadn't even met her escort until some friend of her father's had brought up a cadet in a gray uniform with lots of shiny buttons down the front and a chevron on one sleeve. But after that, the rest had been made easy by a little card that had a tiny pencil and names written in for every dance. With that dangling from a button of her long white glove, she hadn't had to think of making herself popular. As she had waltzed or two-stepped by her father, she had smiled at him with a new confidence. He'd been sitting in the sidelines on a red velvet seat, pretending to be interested in an old man who had worn gold braid enough to be a General. But he had

beamed as she'd passed by and she had known that he was watching her. When the hop had closed and she had told him all of her engagements for the week ahead, "Now you're launched," he'd said.

Providence seemed quite another world that she didn't have to think about. So did Bryn Mawr. Except that she would like to write Miss Hoyt that she was altogether wrong about West Point. It was as broadening as a trip to England or to Paris. Even at "The Rocks" in Highland Falls where they were staying, there was more to learn, Meg felt, than she could possibly take in.

First of all there was old Colonel Caleb Huse, who with his wife, had asked Meg and her father if they wouldn't spend a month in his big airy house that had a long front porch high up among the treetops and that overlooked the Hudson River. He had a military bearing and he looked historic like a woodcut in a history book. But when she'd said that to her father, he had closed both doors to their connecting rooms and dropped his voice till it became a whisper. The Colonel, he had told her, was a man who'd paid a tragic price for his convictions. Though he came from Massachusetts, he had fought on the wrong side all through the Civil War. To meet him must be broadening since he was the only tragic character she'd ever met.

Then there were the ladies from South Carolina who had sons in the Corps but who wouldn't rise as the Stars and Stripes went by each evening at Parade. "I have no flag. I have no country," one of them had told Meg proudly as though the Civil War was going on, and they were on hostile grounds.

But of all the guests who spent their summers at "The Rocks," Meg was most interested in her own Cousin Caroline Rixbey, who claimed her as Virginia kin and who was like no lady that Meg knew in Providence. There, no lady ever spoke about her looks or who had been attentive to her. But Cousin Caroline had announced at once that she had been a Southern belle and had named some of the men she'd been engaged to. Not that she'd ever dreamed, she said, of marrying outside the Army. No girl would who had a trace of romance in her nature. The queer part was that even while she talked, her married life at Army posts didn't seem romantic. It had been lived in little garrisons

and forts in Nebraska or in Omaha and Idaho until there had been the Spanish War and then the Philippines. But after just one year out in Manila, her husband had returned her to this country because, she said, he couldn't bear to have her beauty perish in that torrid climate. While she discoursed upon his chivalry, Meg often sat beside her thinking that her own mother would have stuck it out. If her father had had to stay, her mother never would have left.

Moreover, she felt that Colonel Rixbey's chivalry had come too late. Cousin Caroline still had flashing eyes and lovely features, but her skin was like a slightly faded tea-rose; and no amount of veils and parasols could bring its delicacy back. She knew that, too. That was the sacrifice that she had made, as she so often sighed, to love and country. After that she always reached the end that Meg had come to listen for. Now nothing lay ahead except what lay ahead for every Army woman; three volleys fired across her husband's grave and "Taps" played on a bugle. Apparently there was no question of Cousin Caroline's dying first.

Meanwhile with a son in the Plebe Class, she took a tiny fee for chaperoning Southern girls who needed woefully to get a husband. Whom could they find, she'd ask, in Alabama or in Georgia or even in Virginia? When she talked of them she used a special language. With the best blood spilled in campaigns that had ravished a fair land, she was doing yeoman's service, so she said, when she took a bevy underneath her wing and brought them to West Point.

At the moment, she was guarding three and planning out their daily lives for them. But she was glad to give advice to a young girl who was her kin and who had no one but her father to instruct her. Never, Cousin Caroline warned, must a girl sit out a dance on the big balcony of Cullum Hall or go down Flirtation Walk except in the broad daylight. As for going to "Fort Put," no cadet who was a gentleman would ever think of taking her until he'd had a talk with the person who had charge of her and unless he meant to put his class ring on her finger that would later wear a wedding band.

These were admonitions that Meg hadn't heard her father mention. Probably he didn't know he should. However, that was

unimportant since each cadet was trained to know what was correct.

All the same, the very nicest of them did bewilder her. They wished to guard her from the sun and to protect her from the slightest breeze in a way she wasn't used to. And they always seemed to want her to be tired; too tired to stand, too tired to open her own parasol or to use her fan herself; too tired to do more than to take a little stroll at a slow dawdling pace.

And the proper places for a stroll were so restricted. Soaring up against the western sky was Crow's Nest, the wild mountain that caught thunder clouds and tore them down in tatters. "If I was only strong enough to take you up it once," Meg would hear her father say. "That was what I hoped to do when you were little." But nowadays from the edge of the Parade Ground, he had to be content with pointing out the lofty notches and the spurs that he had scaled long years ago.

If only Gid were here. It was impossible to think of him as a cadet confined in a gray uniform. But if he were here just as himself, he would know that climbing crags and finding wild, strange plants was much more important than behavior. He would be plunging through thick undergrowth with little thought of how she fared while he called out his own discoveries and he'd think that she was silly and affected if she told him that she had to have a chaperon or drooped down upon a bench before she'd walked even a quarter of a mile.

In a way though she was being a success; as much of a success as Cousin Caroline's three protégées.

Cadets did love explaining; and Meg had found she had only to tell them that Bryn Mawr was purely British to fire their ardent patriotism. They were never tired of showing her the great linked chains that had been stretched across the Hudson to hold back the British ships or of displaying the three-cornered piles of huge black cannon balls or the caissons used in battles that she'd never heard of. Best of all they liked to take her to the chapel that stood empty every day but Sunday. There they pointed out the flags and the shields of all the Generals in the Revolution. In a half-circle, they were placed high up above the chancel with Benedict Arnold's shield reversed.

"Won't they ever take it down?" Meg would ask.

"That's how we treat a traitor," each cadet would say as though he had a hand in perpetuating the disgrace.

Only her father cared about the small brick house which he had lived in as a boy.

"Why, the rats swung on the very bell ropes," he'd remark as though that recollection were a matter for great pride.

But the Southerners all cared about the big, brick, vine-draped house in which General Lee had lived when he had been Superintendent. When they led her past it, they stopped speaking and very reverently and a little ostentatiously, they removed their caps and held them close across their hearts.

American History was all about her; and Meg had never learned about it, not in school or college. She did know that the Revolution had been won by General Washington and that ancestors of her own had helped in burning the Gaspee and that there had been a surrender by a General called Cornwallis and a great American General called Nathanael Greene, who had come from her own State.

And she had thought that she knew what was important in the Civil War. Her father had volunteered and had left college to go off and fight in it. He'd been in the Tenth Rhode Island Volunteers and had served under "Little Mac" and he was a Grand Army man who could march in Decoration Day parades and wear a copper button in his left lapel. A famous General whose name was Burnside, and who had a big equestrian statue in the midst of Market Square, had come from Providence. And General Grant when he had won a victory from Lee had acted like a gentleman. She had had no curiosity beyond those facts.

But today while they had strolled beneath the elms at the edge of the Parade Ground, Meg had grown tired of Clifford Early's boastfulness.

"I didn't know," she'd said, "that the South won any battle but Bull Run."

As a rule, he was so tall that he tipped backwards when he walked. But at her words, he had drawn himself erect and had looked very proud and utterly amazed.

"Then I don't reckon," he had said, "that you ever heard about

my Grand-dad, Jubal Early, and how he led his troops within the sight of Washington. I don't reckon that you've even heard of Gallant Pelham or of Stonewall Jackson."

At the last name a memory had stirred.

"Stonewall Jackson was the one," she'd said, "whom Barbara Frietchie dared to shoot her head off, and he didn't."

For the first time Clifford Early had stopped paying compliments and had used a tone of stern command.

"You sit down on this bench and hark," he'd ordered. Then he'd told her about Chancellorsville and the dreadful battle that had happened there.

"Before Parade," he had concluded, "you-all could do a powerful lot of reading in the Library."

That was what she meant to do this very moment. But now that she had stepped inside the cool, dim, book-lined room, there was so much for her to look at; especially the paintings that were hung around the walls. One by one, she looked at them until suddenly her gaze was held by an oil painting that reminded her of her own father with his face in profile. It had the same high brow, the same fine nose, long and thin with an upcurving nostril, the same keen speculative eye, the same sensitive lines about the mouth. And underneath in letters that were tarnished was the name: "Jacob Whitman Bailey." Below in smaller letters was the statement: "Professor of Geology: 1834-1858."

"Why, that's my own grandfather," she said aloud unconsciously.

"He couldn't be," a man's voice said. "You're much too young for him to be your grandfather."

"But he truly was," she was insisting. "It's only that my father married awfully late."

"I have," the voice went on, "the honor of being one of his successors. I am the present head of his Department."

Meg had turned to see the handsomest man she'd ever seen. He was dressed in an artillery uniform which he seemed to make resplendent by his height and carriage and by his strong, proud, utterly serious face. With its prominent nose and chin, what his face really was, was arrogant. Meg could not imagine it as condescending to a laugh or as relaxing from a consciousness of his

own looks or his ability to discipline whoever might be serving under him. He meant to be impressive, and she had the feeling that he thought he was impressing her.

But all the while that they stood talking, he told her what a privilege it was to handle any microscope that had once been her grandfather's and to tabulate his minerals and to sort the crystals that he had collected.

"I wish that I could see the crystals," she broke in. "Geology's what I did best in at Bryn Mawr. I do wish that I could see my grandfather's own laboratory."

"I didn't know," the man replied, "that girls were ever interested in science; certainly not any girl who spent her summer at West Point. You mean you'd really like to have me show the laboratory to you?"

They had started towards the door before Meg thought of Cousin Caroline Rixbey and of what she called "the nice proprieties." Meg could hear her own voice take on a mince.

"I don't believe I ought to go," she said. "Not till we've been introduced."

"That's an easy matter," said the man.

In a second he was leading her to a deep alcove where the sunlight fell through diamond leaded panes and where an old gentleman was sitting in a high wheel chair. He was a short and heavy man in an immaculate white linen suit and he had very thin white hair and white scanty side-whiskers that made his skin seem baby pink. But the eye that he fixed on Meg was like an elephant's; small and twinkly and wise and shrewd.

"So Daisy Miller didn't die in Rome," he remarked as Meg came up to him. "So her innocence survived malaria and her unchaperoned adventure with the Italian gentleman."

Meg had read *Daisy Miller* at Bryn Mawr. It had been assigned in English. "I've read about her," she said proudly. "But at Bryn Mawr, they think that she belongs among the lesser works of Henry James."

"Do they indeed?" the old gentleman said. "I've always thought her singularly poignant. Now that I meet her in the flesh, I see no reason for a change of mind."

Meg's companion fortunately interrupted her bewilderment.

"Dr. Holden," he was saying, "This is Jacob Whitman Bailey's granddaughter. She wants to see his laboratory, but before I show it to her, she thinks we should be introduced."

The little elephant eyes looked very deep and thoughtful before Dr. Holden spoke.

"Most people in the world should never meet," he said. "That is an observation from my own experience. Were I to live my life again, my first desire would be to be protected from encountering more than three or four. One of them would be your father. Whitman Bailey. I suppose," and he was smiling at Meg now, "that for pure utter childlike humor and a kind of candor, I should have to place your father first. Odd company he'd be for Henry James whom I should make my second choice."

"Henry James," Meg said. "I didn't know that anybody really knew him. At Bryn Mawr, they call him 'The Master.'"

"'The Master,'" Dr. Holden laughed. "Well, he's paid a visit to me here and I may add we both enjoyed it. But I don't believe you're Whitman Bailey's child. Not his natural child at any rate. If you were, you'd be entirely unconcerned about conventions. You'd be over in the Laboratory and not have to know that the gentleman escorting you was Captain Kiley, a hero of Pekin, the youngest captain of our army, and a devil with the married ladies." It was his first remarks that were important.

"I'm not concerned with the proprieties," Meg said. "I never was till I met my Cousin Caroline Rixbey and she made this place all full of them and rather spoiled it. Now I can't do anything I want to do. It's not that I don't like to dance, but I'm awfully sick of strolling. Almost more than anything I wanted to climb Crow's Nest."

"Did you?" asked Dr. Holden, "Well, I've introduced you to the proper escort. Captain Kiley'll take you and he'll bring you back as safe as safe. I can't think of any man who has more caution and discretion with young girls. They're quite outside his line."

CHAPTER XXV

Her father had been delighted when Meg had told him that she'd seen his father's minerals. "Captain Kiley gave you a great privilege," he'd said. "It's an unusual courtesy for an officer to show to a young girl."

But what he could not get over as the days went by, was Meg's deepening friendship with old Dr. Holden. Mornings were an utter waste according to Cousin Caroline and her three protégées. When the cadets were busy with surveying and manœuvres, what could a girl do, they'd ask, except to freshen up her wardrobe? On the sunny porch down at "The Rocks" they sat in a close group and did what they called modest sewing while they gossiped over last night's hop or concert. But Meg had found a more exciting way to spend her time.

Up till lunch time, her father liked to stay at home or browse about collecting nearby wildflowers. But he also liked to have her walk the three miles to West Point to spend her time with Dr. Holden who was, he said, an education in himself.

Somehow from the start, Meg knew that she was welcome in the dim, cool library and that she was being treated with a special gentleness. Not that the old man always stopped his work to talk to her. But near his desk was placed a chair that she had come to recognize as hers. Usually the books he gave her were French. The novels of Stendhal and Chantepleuve and Balzac and Flaubert were what he wanted her to read.

"Suppose that you don't understand them," he was saying at the moment. "Something from them will sink in and it's best for you to get your first shock from the printed page. Besides, it's just your father's training that makes you think you'd like to pose as an Elaine and polish Launcelot's armor. You're not a polisher by nature. You're far more apt to seek adventure of your own . . ."

Was she? The only adventure that she could recall with real excitement was the time when she had dared to go inside the Bogerts' house at Little Compton. She still remembered the drive

back to her boardinghouse as being like the drive which Hardy's "Tess" had taken by the side of Alec D'Urberville. She had sat close by a man whose nearness had disturbed her in a queer new way. She had stared fascinated at his hands and wondered how she'd feel if they should ever touch her. No one else had made her feel like that.

"No, you're not the Lily Maid." Dr. Holden gave a grunt. "And if you were, don't get the notion that Kiley would trust you with his shield. He'd only trust it to a most efficient orderly. What's more, in other ways, Kiley wouldn't qualify as Launcelot. Not that the fellow isn't brave. He is. He's proved it. But if I recall my Tennyson aright, Launcelot had some sensitivity. His handsome face, so says the tale, was made and marred by the great and guilty love he bare the Queen."

Meg laughed. She couldn't think of Captain Kiley's face as marred by feeling.

"Maybe he's never met a Guinevere," she said.

"Never met one? Why, at every Army Post there is a Guinevere of sorts. The Army seems to breed them just as it breeds King Arthurs and Sir Galahads. It's the more complicated characters that it runs shy on. Which for efficiency is quite as well. They only serve to clutter up the works."

Dr. Holden stopped abruptly, which meant that he was bored or finished with a subject. Meg could read or she could sit quietly and watch him straighten out the litter on his desk. He had told her that he was busy collecting what he could about the two he called "the great incorrigibles."

"Why in God's name," she heard him sputtering, "Poe and Whistler of all people thought that they could stick West Point. What made them seek the last place in the world to foster genius?"

If she spoke in a low voice, he needn't answer if he didn't wish to.

"What," she asked, "does foster genius?"

"Solitude," he said. "That first of all. The kind of solitude that's far removed from a concern for popular opinion. There ought at least to be a little of that soil for any deep and dangerous emotion."

"Solitude." That was something that Meg had often longed

for; and she'd like to feel one deep and dangerous emotion. But she didn't dare to go on thinking with Dr. Holden eyeing her.

"Genius requires," he was continuing, "the very things from which a woman should be sheltered. Chantepleuve, I tell you, had the right and civilized idea. 'To save herself now for the foreseen then.' That was, he wrote, the fine flower of a woman's education."

"He only liked to think it was," Meg said, "because he was a man."

"So speaks Bryn Mawr," he clipped off the words contemptuously.

"No," she said. "I wasn't thinking of Bryn Mawr. I was thinking that you made a woman's life seem awfully skimpy. Besides, if she really thought about herself like that, she'd have to feel that she was awfully precious."

"So she is, up to a point," he stated firmly. "If she isn't precious in the end, it's she herself who's done the cheapening."

"But I'd rather be a little cheap," Meg argued, "than to keep on dwelling on my value. Suppose I dwelt and dwelt and then found out I didn't have much?"

"Your value at the present time," he said, "is common currency."

There wasn't any use pretending that she understood. Meg sat thinking till she heard him saying:

"I'm talking about youth. What makes your Henry James the Master is that he can use it in a story that is poignant and not trite and silly. Life unfortunately seldom has his gift. For some reason it prefers the Kipling version which is far less distinguished. It's continually letting some man bring an older and sophisticated woman to his terms by a brief devotion to mere dewy innocence. It's the one thing that will bring her around. She can't stand out against it."

"My mother could," Meg said. "She'd have more pride."

For once she had silenced him. He sat drawing little geometric figures on a pad. But after quite a while, he started speaking.

"If I have to dot my i's and cross my t's," he said. "I had hoped that I could make you see that you were only wasting time upon a certain person. He's not your sort. He's not your sort at all. You never should have met him."

"But I've loved meeting him," Meg said. She had.

And there wasn't any use in Cousin Caroline's saying that Captain Kiley was only driving the cadets away and making her conspicuous. When he joined her at Parade and stood beside her, looking very handsome while the flag passed, she liked to be conspicuous.

She felt the same way about the hops in Cullum Hall. Suppose that the cadets were cross when Captain Kiley cut in on a waltz and commandeered her extras. There wasn't any other girl he deigned to dance with. Clad in white and embellished by gold braid, he sat talking with her father till she passed quite near. Then, "Ours, I think," he'd say as he approached. No more than that, with no apology. Once in a while Meg wished that her partner would have the spunk to whirl her by and run the risk of a court martial or whatever military discipline might follow. But he always gave her up and disappeared from sight.

"You see," she was trying to explain to Dr. Holden, "in Providence, I've never had much fun at parties. I couldn't seem to make myself so very popular. No one who was attractive really made himself attentive to me."

"And now that someone has, you think you have to make dove's eyes at him," Dr. Holden interrupted. "A beloved with dove's eyes. I've often thought that was a poor idea of Solomon's. Now that I've seen you making them, I think less well of it. I'd prefer to see you have the dignity of sex."

This time he had hurt her, and he knew it.

"I only wish," he added quickly, "that you had some wise and worldly woman to look after you."

"If you think I'd like to act like one of Cousin Caroline's protégées," she said. "If you think I'd like to droop about and make believe that I couldn't walk and was dying for protection. There's one thing that I won't ever do. I won't make a man think he's got to marry me. I'd rather earn my living and take care of myself."

She got up to leave, but Dr. Holden was too quick for her. In an instant he had pushed his wheel chair backwards from his desk and turned it so that it blocked her way.

"Don't go off in a huff with an old man," he said, "especially

with an old man who only wants good things to come to you. It's very like a compliment if he wants them to come graciously. Kiley for once may be quite serious in his intentions. I don't see why he shouldn't be. But I repeat he's not your sort. He lacks the sort of background you've been used to. He wouldn't understand a word you had to say to him. And all the time, you'd have to listen to him talk about himself and his own exploits. If you married him, you'd even have to let him call you Margaret." He paused before he added. "You'd even have to let him call you Margaret with all that that implies."

With that he let her go. But all the long way back to Highland Falls, Meg kept thinking over his remarks. She did have dignity. Dr. Holden had no right to say she hadn't. If when she danced with Captain Kiley she tried to look the way Maud Adams looked when she played "Babbie" and adored the Little Minister, it was because nothing at West Point seemed very real. With its fife and drum corps and guard-mounting and parades, it seemed like a light opera with all sorts of choruses in costume. She felt like someone acting a stage role.

Still Captain Kiley hadn't made her think one thought she didn't truly think. He hadn't liked it when she'd sided with the rebel Boxers in Pekin and had told him that she didn't see why any foreigner should think he had the right to snatch up precious Mandarin coats to bring back home, or the right to seize a collection of old Chinese sword guards. He hadn't liked it when she'd said that she'd be furious if he saluted her the way that he saluted common soldiers. Least of all he'd liked it when she had scrambled to the very top of Crow's Nest and he'd had to stay behind or run the risk of snagging a good uniform. There were lots of things she did and said that made him cross, but she hadn't changed to please him. Wasn't there a kind of dignity in that?

Cousin Caroline's ideas, of course, were different. In a hallowed tone of voice she spoke of an engagement as "un fait accompli." Only when it was announced, could a girl meet what Cousin Caroline called "the public gaze" with real assurance. There was no assurance, she said, in attentiveness when it dragged on beyond a point. That was where a chaperon came in. She knew the ways to close up any chance of a retreat. Give her the opportunity to have

one little talk with Captain Kiley and she'd soon bring this drifting to a happy end.

"I think it all sounds horrid," Meg had said, "like a game of whist with trumps and tricks." Cousin Caroline had been most formal with her ever since.

She was being formal now that Meg had reached "The Rocks" and had joined the bevy sitting on the porch. They had all stopped talking as she had appeared; and not one of them was going to ask her what she meant to wear tonight or who her partner was or anything. Around them was an icy wall of silence that set her far outside.

All right then. Let them be surprised when they found that Roger Kane was taking her. They thought that he belonged to one of them because he was First Captain of Cadets and ranked his class and was the most dashing man in the whole Corps. When he asked one of them, Cousin Caroline announced the fact to everybody at "The Rocks." He stood out, she said. He had a kind of elegance. She dreamed over her own girlhood every time she saw him dance.

CHAPTER XXVI

Meg had done the very best she could in putting on her white accordion plaited tulle. But she had felt lonely somehow till the hop had actually started. What she had wanted was an older woman who cared about the way she looked and who would straighten out the folds and make her stand across the room and end by saying, "There," with real approval. When Meg had displayed herself to dear old Mrs. Colonel Huse who couldn't see so very well, she had acted only from politeness. And when she had asked her father how he liked her dress, "Why, you could hold your own if you turned up in gunnysack," he'd said. That hadn't helped.

However, now that she was dancing, it did help to have him in the corner watching her. Every time she passed, she caught his

glance and knew how proud it made him feel to see her having a good time.

Right next to him, Dr. Holden was surveying the whole crowded scene from his wheel chair. "Don't go off in a huff with an old man," he'd said. That meant he cared about her too. He had scolded her because he cared. "It's very like a compliment," he'd said, "to want good things to come to you and to want them to come graciously."

"Graciously" was a word that only he would use and he made it have to do with manners of a sort she'd never met.

They would not be frank and blunt as they often were in Providence where people mostly came right out with their opinions. And they would be different from Cousin Caroline's manners. Southerners, so Cousin Caroline said, were born with a real sense of form that stopped short at the Mason Dixon line. North of it, she claimed, all polish ceased and people had no finish. That might be true, but Dr. Holden had meant something different. Polish and finish were thin, slippery words. "Graciously" when spoken, sounded deep and overflowing and as though it went with an intention to be careful not to hurt.

As Meg was thinking, she was dancing past a group of chaperons that included Cousin Caroline, who was wearing a blue sapphire-colored dress. With her full dark eyes and dark arched eyebrows, Cousin Caroline stood out as the handsomest of all of them. She had really saved a lot from the sacrifice she'd made to love and Country. That was what Meg meant to tell her by her smile.

But Cousin Caroline was smiling back in a vague way as though she couldn't quite remember when they'd met. It was as though she were disclaiming her Virginia kin whom at first she had so wanted to take charge of. And she wasn't merely dreaming over her own girlhood. She was jealous for her bevy as she watched Meg dance with Roger Kane.

The best dancer in the room, he was waltzing much too well to let his partner be disturbed for long. Except for the slightest pressure on her waist, she wouldn't know that he was leading.

"Most girls think they have to chatter," he was saying. "They chatter and they bob about."

"If I bobbed about at dancing-school," Meg said, "I had to go out in the middle of the ballroom all alone and dance around a small gilt chair without a partner. Everybody stared and laughed and made it pretty awful. I didn't have to do it very often."

"I should think not," said Roger Kane. "That's the sort of thing we get up here in our Plebe year. It's good for Plebes. It licks them into shape."

"Maybe it licked me into shape."

"Even if it did," he spoke indignantly, "being stared and laughed at is much too tough on any girl."

Slowly the music ebbed and slowly faded. Very slowly it came to a full ebb and stopped.

"No luck for me this time." Roger Kane was glancing at a card that filled the open palm of his white cotton glove.

"Nor for me either," was what Meg wanted to confide. This was Captain Kiley's "extra"; and in a minute she would feel strength that swung and spun her where it liked and didn't trust in her response to rhythms and to changing tempo.

Already a joyful wave of sound was coming from the band. As it began to warm and deepen, cadets and the few scattered officers who came to hops were seeking out new partners. Captain Kiley should be seeking her. Clad in white and gold, he should be saying "Ours, I think," as though he had a claim that everybody took for granted. At least he should be coming towards her through the crowd that had paired off in couples. Yet the couples were beginning to slide past. To get out of their way, she had edged back until she'd reached a row of onlookers. Way, way off, too far to reach she could see her father sitting by the side of Dr. Holden.

"You've got to go," Meg said to Roger Kane. "I think I'd better wait right here."

He was disturbed, she knew. He was glancing here and there to hit on some solution.

"Mrs. Rixbey is close by and she's your cousin, isn't she?" His voice showed his relief. "Until the Captain comes, I'll leave you underneath her wing."

But to have to seek her wing was the worst humiliation Meg could think of.

"I'd much prefer," she said, "to wait alone."

"I don't want to leave you stranded," he was saying.

"Stranded?" She made her voice sound very sure and proud. "Officers don't leave girls stranded in the middle of a ballroom, do they?"

That was a question that he couldn't answer since anything he said would be a criticism of a rank above his own.

"Sure you're all right?" Meg heard him asking doubtfully.

"Of course, I'm sure."

Carelessly she began to preen the little dark green ivy leaves that were the only decoration on her white tulle dress and in a moment he had bowed and was gone.

But she couldn't go on fingering ivy leaves forever and forever. She had to raise her eyes; and what was happening to her now was what never happened at West Point where manners were made much of. She was standing by herself without an escort and without a chaperon and with her father where she couldn't get to him. She could feel her cheeks grow hot as her glance met Cousin Caroline's. Cousin Caroline was glad of her embarrassment and meant to let her know that it would not be happening under her efficient management. She knew, everybody knew, that Captain Kiley had forgotten all about his usual partner and had cut her dance.

Suppose he did turn up at last? What, Meg wondered, was she going to do? Pretend she hadn't minded? That was what girls did. Pretending that they hadn't minded was about the only kind of pride they were allowed.

But she wasn't even going to have a chance for that. Right across the hall from her, gilt pillars framed the door that led out to the dark, forbidden balcony. Captain Kiley was coming through the door and was following a lady who had on the loveliest dress of purple chiffon. It was cut very low in front and held in place by the thinnest shoulder straps of gleaming brilliants. It could not have been homemade like Meg's white tulle, not possibly. There was all the difference in the way it fitted and showed off a figure.

Its skirt was floating from the waist, now that the lady had begun to dance with Captain Kiley. And Meg saw that he wasn't

waltzing as he waltzed with her, but very sleepily and slowly. He and his partner were as close as could be and moving like one person as they glided on the polished floor.

More than anything, as they came near, Meg hoped they wouldn't notice her. They hadn't; and as they passed, she knew they wouldn't notice anyone. Their faces weren't at all alike, yet the same thing had happened to them both. They had lost the look that people wore—was it in public? Some hard, firm prop had given way so that their features seemed to sag and show . . . What was it that they showed? Some reckless terrifying feeling that she'd never felt in all her life, the sort of feeling that French writers liked to write about. Only books had never made it real. Seeing it was different. Seeing made it true so that she couldn't dodge or push away a knowledge that she didn't want to have. It was worse than any fact that she'd been told about, and she was sick and giddy and afraid.

So then she had seen a Guinevere of sorts. Not young, not beautiful, but with a kind of power and fascination that could make a man forget to bother over any girl.

And yet, Meg knew, Captain Kiley had really bothered over her. No one could say he hadn't. And not just by claiming all her "extras" at a hop. Wasn't he forever turning up beside her at Parade or taking her to walk or inviting her to drive with him around the Reservation? Weren't there all the times when he had asked her father and herself to his own bachelor quarters and had let her pour the tea and had shown her what he called "his little trophies"? Why had he behaved like that unless he truly liked her? Wasn't that the way an officer behaved when he had made his choice?

To be the choice of such a handsome older man was very special at West Point. For the first time in her life, Meg had felt secure about her looks and what she wore and everything. The only queer part was that she had hated it when Cousin Caroline kept on telling her how she was going to feel when she went up the aisle in ivory white and came back down it later with her veil thrown back in triumph. There had been something about Captain Kiley that she didn't want to face.

She knew now what it was. She didn't want to have him have

the right to be so very close to her. Rights made closeness different, made it dreadful. They meant not being able to be safe and get away.

As she stood thinking, Captain Kiley was passing very near. He wasn't looking at her, but his partner was. His partner's eyes weren't really closed. Meg saw them looking at her and giving her the faintest lazy smile that she was meant to understand.

It was a smile that took stock of her white tulle dress and made it feel homemade and badly fitted. Older men, it seemed to say, men of experience, liked women who spent money on their clothes. And if Meg thought that Captain Kiley had been attentive to her, his devotion hadn't meant a thing that an older woman couldn't handle when she wished to. Now was the time to end this nonsense while everybody watched.

More than anything, Meg wanted to get outside and hide in the dressing room until the hop was over, but at last here was the intermission and Roger Kane was by her side.

"I couldn't get away before," he said. "There wasn't any way that I could manage it."

"I didn't mind," Meg kept on saying. "I truly didn't mind."

"Any girl would have to mind," he said. "You'd think a woman could play fair. No man would bully some kid half his age."

"Bully me?" She mustn't sound as though she caught his meaning. "It was quite a lot of fun to stand and watch."

Instead of answering, he was staring clear across the ballroom at the lady in the purple dress. She was talking carelessly to Captain Kiley, and, as she talked, she spread or sheathed her fan of purple ostrich plumes and stirred it slowly to and fro. Why should she care that Roger Kane was scowling at her under fierce black eyebrows or that he stood as though he was in charge of Guard Mount or was posing for his picture as First Captain of Cadets?

"The next is ours." He spoke in a sharp voice. "We could give this hall a lesson that it needs—a lesson in Deportment."

"Deportment." That was a word that Meg hadn't heard for years but it stood for what she had been taught in Mrs. Spink's Academy for Dancing. To her it meant "behaving like a little lady"; and in a flash she knew that "behaving like a little lady" was exactly how she didn't mean to act.

If she could, she meant to hurt right back. And not by making dove's eyes or gazing up at Roger Kane adoringly. Those were ways she hadn't seemed to master very well. But though she didn't understand what Dr. Holden meant about the dignity of sex, she knew she had never felt as dignified as when she'd been a little girl at Mrs. Spink's.

"Would you mind," she was begging Roger Kane, "would you mind very much if I waltzed this next the way I used to have to waltz in dancing school?"

There was something in the idea that amused him. He was bowing very deeply from the waist and holding out his arm.

Before she took it, she was spreading her accordion plaited skirt into a sheer thin fan and almost dropping him a courtsey. For what she meant to do, her white tulle dress with its single spray of ivy leaves across the front was just exactly right. So was the music that the band was playing. *The Viennese Forest* had always made her think about spring foliage and the way it had of seeming cool and delicate. She must make each step as cool and delicate. And at first she could afford to be a little shy and awkward till the moment came when she forgot that she was actually dancing with a boy because the rhythms were so lovely.

"I'd think," said Roger Kane, when they had gone around the room, "that I was waltzing with my own kid sister."

"That's exactly how I hoped you'd feel," Meg said.

But he had given her a new idea about this part where the tempo surged and quickened. If there was sheer fun in skimming over ice, there was sheer fun in skimming over a waxed floor. A partner mattered only in his skill in keeping pace and trying out new steps. She was turning in mad, giddy whirls, then drifting till there was another whirl.

"If one could only stay that young," she heard a lady say.

But "that young" was what she'd been this morning when she'd sat with Dr. Holden in the library. Now deep down was something shocked and hurt.

"Tired?" asked Roger Kane as though he'd noticed.

"Oh, no," she said. "It's wonderful. I could go on all night."

So far, Meg hadn't dared to glance at any of the people who were sitting round the edge of the big ballroom, but now that

she was drifting by her Cousin Caroline, it was fun to give a careless, joyful nod. And now that her gaze was searching for one couple, she was smiling dreamily. This was what it was to waltz with someone close to her own age. It made a world of difference. Surely Captain Kiley had to see it made a world of difference. She had never danced this way with him, not ever. Who cared that he had cut a waltz? He was far too old to count.

So was the lady sitting by his side. Youth was something that she couldn't have again; and as Meg looked at her, she meant to have youth seem important. At eighteen a girl needn't worry if she had to wear a homemade dress. She could turn up in gunny-sack and hold her own. Right this very minute she was holding it. The lady might pretend she wasn't noticing, but she was.

If she turned away and didn't want to watch, others did. They were showing that they did, so that they made it seem like being on the stage before an audience. As the music rose and fell and rose and died away for good, there was a cry of "Encore" and a loud burst of applause.

"Thank you for the pleasure of the dance," said Roger Kane. But though he was leading Meg to where her father sat with Dr. Holden, he wanted to go on. He had enjoyed himself.

"We've just stopped for a moment, Sir," he was explaining to her father. "We're going to have another fling."

"No," said the crisp voice of Dr. Holden. "A ballerina, if she's wise, knows better than to give an encore. Her partner, if he's wise, knows better than to let her try it." Then as he drew Meg towards him, he spoke in a low voice. "Not Daisy Miller, but Miss Minx," he said.

CHAPTER XXVII

Since that night, "chivalry" had become a word that Meg could not endure. "Noble" had become another; and "gallant" was a third.

And her father innocently kept on using them; and when he did, she couldn't seem to stop from hurting him.

He loved West Point. When he was here, old happy memories, he said, soaked into him like sunlight and warmed him to the very gills. And he did want Meg so to love it too. No matter where they walked, he kept pointing out the view of the fierce brooding Catskills with the Hudson River winding on its silvery course below them. Other people mightn't understand his passion for the place but he had believed she would when she once saw it and that they'd have an even closer bond.

"Even along the Rhine," he had remarked the other day, "there isn't scenery more noble."

At once Meg had felt a sharp recoil.

"I'd like to see a cove and a salt marsh," she'd said and she had known that she sounded like her Grandma Simmons making a remark.

Then when Meg had started in to pack her trunk for going home, her father had sat down in her bedroom and had told her of a dream that he had cherished for her. She mustn't judge of marriage, he had said, by what she'd seen of it at too close quarters. An Army marriage was a different matter. Men didn't come more gallant . . .

"Daddy, please don't," she'd begged. "If only you wouldn't sound so much like Cousin Caroline." She had spoken to him in a hard, new voice.

But what hurt him most was the way she'd stopped confiding in him. "Kiley must have given you some sort of explanation," her father had started. "No," Meg had said. "He hasn't had a chance to." That was absolutely true. Nowadays before an "extra" came, she deliberately stepped out on the dark, forbidden balcony where she was safe except from talks about her being quite as cold and distant as the starlight. Cadets began that way and there they paused, waiting for a lead. Lacking one, they had no subject but their futures in the Army. They liked to speak of carving out careers. However, listening to them made her popular and she had more dates than she could manage. But when the dates were over, she couldn't seem to speak about them to her father. "I had a lovely time" was the most that she could say.

Anyhow she had stuck out her visit to the end as though she'd never stood deserted in a ballroom and been used to serve a pur-

pose. What's more, in these last days, she was being a "Succès fou," according to her Cousin Caroline. Meg's plight, so Cousin Caroline said, had appealed to the cadets and had aroused their sense of chivalry. They were all rallying around her, weren't they? Then other questions followed in a silken voice. Wasn't there one sentiment that was close akin to another deeper one that every girl looked forward to? Wouldn't it be wise to linger on another week? Who knew what might happen?

"Would you mind not asking any of the bevy in my place?" was the one request that Meg had made to Roger Kane when he had invited her to come back to his Graduation Hop.

No one, however, but her father had dared to speak to her of Captain Kiley, not even Dr. Holden. As she laid her dress down on the bed and began to fold the skirt, she was surprised to hear her father venturing again.

"This morning," he was saying, "I saw Kiley head across the plain hell-bent and join you."

"Yes," Meg said, "he joined me."

As she spoke, she began to crumple up white tissue paper casually and stuff the empty sleeves till they puffed out with it.

"Kiley had a chat with me," her father said. "He wants to make amends. He offered me the handsomest apology."

"He mostly talked about Pekin to me," Meg said as she straightened out a frill.

"Why Pekin?" Her father knew she meant to puzzle him.

"Because he was the hero of Pekin," she said. "Because it's the one place that he truly likes to talk about. It's where he picked up all his little trophies."

"Surely he wasn't talking about them at this point?"

"Yes, in a way he was." She was trying hard to make her voice indifferent. "Captain Kiley wanted me to know that he toppled down Pekin in only thirty minutes. He wanted me to know that he was there and hurried things and got his little trophies sooner than seemed possible."

"Didn't you even tell him you were going to leave for Providence?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "That was the point of our whole conversation. When I told him that I had just thirty minutes in which

to make a farewell call and catch the bus to Highland Falls, he started talking of Pekin! You see it only took that long to make that fall. He seemed to think I'd like to be another little trophy."

Her father had to give her up. "I used to think we were so close," he sighed. That was his only protest as he got up from his chair and went back to his room.

She could protect herself from him, but she wasn't half so sure of her defense when it came to her last interview with Dr. Holden. She had put it off and off, and yet she knew she couldn't leave West Point without going to the Library to say good-bye.

As she walked the long dusty three miles, she thought of how she meant to act. She could be proud and casual as she had been with her father. Or she could be brief and very formal. She might merely thank the Doctor for all the pains he'd taken in introducing her to Balzac and Chantepleuve and to French writers generally. She wouldn't have to say that things were very different when they happened only on the printed page. She had thought up lots of different little speeches before she went up the Library steps and pulled open the big heavy door.

The central room was dim, but a gush of yellow light was falling through the leaded panes in the front alcove. At his desk, there sat the Doctor. And near him was her chair. The green, felt-covered arm to it was bare of books, but it was standing ready for her.

As he heard her steps, he stopped his work and swung his heavy body sidewise.

"I trusted you to come," he said.

Then as she sat beside him for a long, long while, he didn't seem to have a word to say to her. "My child," he started once and stopped abruptly as though he'd had a change of thought. When he did start to speak it was in a different voice from any that she'd heard him use. It was as though he meant to let affection show.

"Young people never want advice," he said, "not even the advice they ask for. It's always bound to meet two fates. They jest at it and take it much too seriously, both at the same moment. But go back to Bryn Mawr. That's at least a star to hitch your wagon to. Pitch in and work. Work hard. Not for high marks but

for a different sort of profit. You've told me that you want to write. Well, don't let those people down there lead you into writing twaddle. Twaddle is what it's sure to be if you try your hand at copying the Master. Henry James is old and very worldly-wise and subtle and he knows a thousand implications to one situation. I don't believe you ever will. It's hard to tell about you now when your thoughts are just heat lightning. But I believe some day you're going to have a mind."

"I don't believe it's going to be so very good," Meg said. "I never seem to get the point of things."

"No," the Doctor said, "you don't." And yet he didn't hurt. "All the same I think your mind is going to have one virtue. I shouldn't wonder if you stayed naïve for your whole lifetime. That means you're always going to have new wonderments. Each time you're going to be surprised. Each time you're going to be amazed and get the whole full shock."

"Why," Meg asked, "is that a virtue?"

"Because," he said, "each time you'll get a new fresh imprint. That doesn't happen to most people. When you try to write, trust to those imprints. Don't muddle them together. Keep them separate. That's the advice of an old man who knows the Master and respects him and who doesn't give a tinker's damn about his recent characters who give themselves to splitting hairs when hairs are fine enough for anybody. Except for *Daisy Miller* have no more to do with Henry James and all his subtleties."

"Meanwhile," he started off again, "what I most hope for you is that you may be petted and made much of by some charming people. You're ready to be talked to—not too much but wisely—by such people. If you ever should sit down and write your book, I hope that you'll remember them and want to please them. I hope you'll want to please them more than you've wanted anything as yet in your whole life."

With that his manner changed to a dismissal.

"Send me some of your college themes," he said. "I'll red-pencil them. I'll treat you to a taste of real professional criticism. Which means I won't be kind."

As Meg shook hands with him, he added.

"There's another kind of kindness you could try your hand

at. I mean your kindness towards your father. Nothing that's happened to you here is worth your hurting him. Range yourself with him. You won't be sorry."

That was the last he had to say. He hadn't mentioned Captain Kiley or the way she'd acted in revenge or anything that was important. But as Meg walked back to "The Rocks" and to all of the good-bye's that lay ahead of her, she knew that she was walking with a lighter step.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Almost as soon as they got home, Meg saw her father leave for Cousin Julia's. And this time, he hadn't gone to get away from Grandmother and all the Simmonses. He had gone to get away from her. She had wounded him as much as that.

How much he'd told about their visit to West Point, Meg had no idea except that she knew he wouldn't tell a thing that shamed her. If she wanted to confide, she could; but the version of their trip, he would allow to be her version. It had been fuller than she had dared to hope that she could make it. She had described old Colonel Huse and Mrs. Huse and their generous ways of hospitality and she had chattered on about cadets and especially about old Dr. Holden. But of Captain Kiley she hadn't said one word.

It seemed to her that she had managed very well until she heard Grandma Simmons saying,

"Would you think that anyone could be so private?"

"Meg could," her mother's voice had answered. "Meg never really tells us anything. Not if it's important. And whatever happened to her was important. In some ways it's made her harder than a rock."

Had it? She couldn't bear to think of how she'd hurt her father. But when she listened to other girls discuss how they had spent the summer, she kept very still and felt proud of being worldly-wise and experienced and old. Amey would never have to read French novels to be prepared for what went on at Petersham. Everybody living in the houses all along the cool green leafy Commons came

from Boston or from Salem or from Cambridge; and though no Guinevere would want to go there, they wouldn't let her if she did. Mostly they were older people who sat under favorite shade trees and read history or poetry out loud to a selected group of listeners. When they weren't doing that, they went on picnics that were always broken up by thunderstorms or they went on long, slow drives to get a view of Mt. Monadnock. And in the evening, they played "guessing games" or sometimes had a little music when a Harvard Senior played the flute.

Martie had stayed home, but certainly she didn't need to read French books to be prepared for the boys who had turned up every single evening and had sat on the front porch and sung college songs together in close harmony. All she'd had to do, had been to furnish a big pitcher of iced lemonade.

And though Alice had reviewed the continental scene, Meg couldn't feel that her trip had been as broadening as her own experience. What Alice talked about this time was the Cathedral in Cologne and the Tiergarten in Berlin and endless art galleries. She had brought back a mountain stock for climbing Alps and a wooly piece of edelweiss that had been plucked for her by a real German guide who had hummed "Du bist wie eine Blume" as he had presented it. But what really had excited her was to have been pushed right off the sidewalk by a group of handsome Prussian officers. Who do you think one of them was? she'd ask. Prince Eitel-Fritz and he was the Kaiser's very favorite son!

Mildred Jastrum, down at Edgartown, had only sailed a boat; but Virginia had been at Narragansett Pier and had begun to read *Town Topics*. She had the latest copy by her bedside on a little table so that she could keep up with the lives of the people whom she'd seen at the Casino. But though she knew that they were "fast," much "faster" than anyone in Providence, she had never actually met them. She might talk about the way they carried on "an intrigue." But she herself had never been "involved." Those were brand new words, but once she understood them, Meg knew that she had been involved in a real intrigue at West Point.

The only trouble was that to keep on being proud and worldly-wise and hard, she had to be mysterious. And that meant being

very lonely. She hadn't known how much she wanted to see Gid until his mother, Mrs. Codman, had written in a spidery, thin hand and had asked her down to Bristol Ferry for the night.

This time there was no deliberation over the acceptance.

"Being with Gid is always good for you," Meg's mother said at once. What she truly meant was that she expected Meg to come home far more comfortable to have around the house and more like what was called "her own real self."

Maybe that was true. Now that Meg was in her seat and the accommodation train was on its way, it was fun to see whole scenes slide by; scenes with which she was familiar. No one possibly could call them "noble." At East Providence, great mounds of oyster shells were towering up like hillocks and dwindling all the little shacks and sheds that had been stuck about the docks below them. Next, there was a stretch of deep, dense green. Then at Squantum, where the Bay went widening out beyond a ragged, reddish rim of cliffs was one view she always looked for. There, close to the channel buoys, was the toy-like lighthouse that she'd once wanted so to live in. She still knew precisely where it stood on the small bluff with the tiniest white picket fence around it and with a grove of scraggly wind-blown cedars that ran downhill to what seemed the barest inch of cove. With the waterfront at last too far away to see, here was Drownsville with an orchard of old twisted apple trees divided by the railroad track; and at Barrington, here was the bridge with the tide-river plunging under it in a swift rush and with a view of the church spires of Warren pointing up above the crests of elms and disappearing slowly as they were blotted out by blocks of ugly red brick mills. Once the low, double tenements were left behind, flat pastureland was spreading out and out. It was soft and blowy at this time of year and the clumps of bayberry were turning almost olive purple. Roofs with fat single chimneys were beginning to appear and finally whole farmhouses. At last the train was toiling round a bend and drawing into Bristol; and at the end of streets, there was the flash of a white sail and the soar of a slim mast and the spiderwork of rigging. Almost before she knew it, the train had come to a full halt and she was on the platform of the dingy station facing Gid.

At once she could feel his eyes search for and find a change in her.

"You're all grown up," he spoke in a resentful voice as he picked up her bag.

"No," she said. "I'm not. I won't be when I change my dress."

All the same, she knew that she was looking at him differently and making a comparison. He wasn't handsome, not like Captain Kiley. He could never stride across Parade Grounds and make a girl conspicuous by joining her. He wasn't even handsome in the plain, straightforward way of some of the cadets. His looks depended on the way he moved, with a light, natural ease, holding his head a little scornfully. And they depended on a quality that she hadn't had a word for until she'd heard Dr. Holden use it. "Sensitivity." What Captain Kiley's face had lacked, Gid's had too much of. His features were too finely cut except that they seemed right for his strangely brooding eyes.

He, on his part, was looking at her in a quite new way.

"I should think," he was saying after a slight pause, "that you'd want to grow up being *only* pretty."

"Only?" she had to ask because she didn't understand.

"Yes," he said. "I don't like peonies. They're much too showy."

"That's my high color," Meg was explaining. "Mother says it isn't going to last long. She says it's going to tone down in two years."

This afternoon, she meant to tan it in the shining brightness.

"I hope you brought a decent dress for sailing," Gid remarked as he put her bag into the carriage. She nodded as he turned to help her in; and soon Frank, the nice fat friendly coachman, had turned into a stolid back of bottle green.

At last they were turning in the circling gravel drive between stiff rows of Norway spruces and were stopping underneath the porte-cochere of the Codmans' big brown, gloomy house whose lines were broken up by turrets and bay windows. There in the dimness of the porch stood Mrs. Codman; and even though she smiled in welcome, her face was like a delicate shell cameo with a curious stillness and remoteness that drew no light or warmth from the bright day.

Meg had expected to sit down beside her where a basket chair

stood in the bulge of the wide porch that was sheltered by the broad flat leaves of pipe vines. But after the usual few questions, her hostess was suggesting that this was too fine an afternoon to take a moment from a sail out on the Bay.

"I'd go right upstairs and change my dress," she said. "Gid fidgets so. It's so much easier to let him have his way than it is to have him fidgeting."

In no time at all, Meg was standing in an airy, wind-swept bedroom where the curtains fluttered at the long French windows which opened out on little useless balconies, but which let in gusts of strong salt air. In a room so spacious, it did seem odd to be putting on her old brown sailor suit. Besides, she had to laugh at her reflection in the pier glass. No cadet who saw her now would ask her to go down Flirtation Walk or pay her any compliment, but this was the kind of rig Gid liked to have her wear when they went sailing.

What's more, it went with his own costume. There he was, waiting for her at the bottom of the flight of slippery, polished steps; and he was clad in faded khaki breeches and a sun-bleached shirt that was wide open at the throat.

"We've got to walk up to the shipyard," he was saying.

But the shipyard was way up in Bristol proper, and where the sloping lawn stopped short, there was a fence-railed walk that led down to the Codmans' private dock. All sorts of little craft were bobbing gently as they rode at anchor, and further out a racing yacht was lying with her swift prow pointing with the tide.

"Why don't you keep your catboat here?" Meg asked.

"Because it's mine," Gid spoke abruptly. "I like to keep it where it can be cheap and common without anybody's criticizing."

"Anybody" meant his father. When Gid had to speak of him, it had become the only word he used; and he used it like a bar that stopped intrusion on a private road.

Once they were walking in the middle of a level sandy lane it was exactly like old times. Meg felt as though she'd never had to stroll beneath a parasol. Sometimes Gid was saying unimportant things about the farms he liked to stop at, but mostly they were striding silently at a quick pace.

"Do we have to hurry now?" Meg asked as they began to

pass the lovely houses that had been built by whaling captains. Some of the houses were still as down-at-heel and worn and shabby as they were in her memory. But nowhere in Rhode Island were there finer doorways, each with its fanlight set in bead-work. Meg had a favorite wooden one and here it was; painted light canary yellow and adorned with a long balustrade that was delicately latticed and edged with carefully wrought garlands and spaced golden urns.

It was Gid's favorite, too. He didn't mind her lagging while they gazed at it. But as they left and passed beneath an elm whose great roots were crumbling up the sidewalk, she caught a glimpse of a dim leafy garden that she hadn't seen before. It had a maze of box. Not since the days of Hillwood had she seen a maze. She was heading towards it when she felt Gid hold her back.

"No," he was saying. "I don't ever go that way. I've planned it so I never have to."

There was such fierceness in his voice that she was following him without a comment. On their walks in Providence, Meg knew he had aversions, but she had never heard him speak like this.

"I was born there on that street," he said at last. "That's why I take the next one."

He spoke as though she ought to understand. But she was thinking of her father's deep, deep feeling for West Point and for his little red brick house where "the rats swung on the very bell ropes." She was thinking of her own feeling for the big, ugly chocolate-colored double house on Cushing Street.

"Everybody loves their birthplace," Meg protested.

"I don't," Gid contradicted her.

He was walking at so fast a rate down the steep pitch that ended at the waterfront that she was way behind him when he turned in at the Herreshoff's great, crowded shipyard and went out on one of the long docks.

Once, however, that they were on board, he was working off his mood while he got things in readiness and shook out the sail and ran it up and straightened out the ropes. Now that he had swung the boom out and had the tiller in his hand and was busy dodging all the small craft, he was giving her brief orders in his usual voice.

This was the way to spend an afternoon in the blue weather. Off to the starboard side was the long reach of Papoosesquaw Neck. Nearer and nearer came the bright green lawns and the great single Southern-looking mansions, each very separate and proud. In the one that had the loftiest roof and tallest pillars lived old Miss Alicia Middleton. Gid loved to tell about her. She knew what grandness truly was. She could be grand without a penny. Now that she was poor and had only one of her old colored servants left, she trusted to her friends to like her just the same even though she couldn't treat them like real company. When Gid dropped in, she let him cook a meal. Better still, she let him set the table with her finest Lowestoft.

As he ran on, half the time Meg wasn't listening. She was too busy recognizing every point of land with which she was familiar. Besides, every time she glanced his way, she could feel the pleasure he was taking in the rush of wind and in the spatter of salt spray and smell of brine. Here on the water he was free of something.

Only it had started to come back, the moment he had brought his boat around and had begun to head towards home.

Was it when they had made port that she had begun to notice a new sort of fussiness? Little things, the placing of a bucket or a dipper, or the coiling of a rope, he'd had to leave behind in just one way. Sometimes he'd had to finger them to make quite sure. Then when they'd come ashore, they had had to tie at one especial ladder and no other; and on the dock, they'd had to walk on special planks and to pass by certain offices and sheds. Even on the street, Meg knew that they were following a route that had become a set of grooves. And at the very end where they left the road for pastures thick with spires of cedars and big clumps of bayberry, there were a dozen little cowpaths threading through the undergrowth.

"Let's go this way," she said because it skirted a small pond.

"No," he said. "That's not the path I take to reach the house."

Why was he so finicky over things that were so unimportant? Certainly when he went off botanizing with her father, he loved having no fixed way of doing things, of rambling off and turning up and rambling off again.

And everywhere they went in Providence, didn't he behave as

no one else would think of acting? Who was freer of formality even when he went to see quite formal people? Was anyone in a nice way more lawless, turning all conventions upside down and topsy-turvy till he was as much at home in pantries and in kitchens as he was in drawing rooms or ballrooms? Didn't she think about him as a king or princeling who could do exactly as he liked?

Yet here at Bristol where he lived in summer, even on his own land, he was behaving as though he found a kind of safety in doing things in the same way and not being noticed more than need be.

"I like this path," he said. "It's hidden from the porch."

There was no one on the porch to watch it at the moment.

"My mother's upstairs resting," he explained as they stood in the front hall and then he added,

"We can't really talk till after dinner. I warn you dinner can be awful. Mother likes to think she's living in the past. Sometimes it makes her cross if people don't remember or don't know the little things she talks about. It can be awfully hard to be polite."

With that warning, he sent Meg up to change her dress.

CHAPTER XXIX

Politeness was, Meg found, the easiest thing to show to Mrs. Codman. Mrs. Codman was the one who made it easy. She liked the yellow dress that Meg was wearing and said it went with her high color and that it would be a pity when her color did tone down.

"I'll take your arm," she said as they went in to dinner. "My husband is detained in town and you shall sit by me."

Following them, came her companion, Miss Brownell, who had nice eyes and sandy hair and a big kindly face and who wore a very large lace jabot across the front of her black satin dress. She stood waiting, very big and broad and competent, until Gid seated her, the last of all.

Soup tasted good, Meg found, after all the hours that she had

spent out sailing. It would taste good even in other plates than it was served in. But there was a sort of extra pleasure that came from looking at the Dresden china and the bowl of deep red Jaqueminot and the thin crystal goblets. She had just put down her spoon when she found her hand in Mrs. Codman's hand.

In shape it was curiously like Gid's, but it was too frail to lift the heavy silver that went with the meat course. Miss Brownell was busy cutting slivers into the tiniest bits.

Mrs. Codman wasn't eating though. She was too busy asking questions. Mostly they were questions that Meg couldn't answer. They all had to do with Hillwood when there had been big balls or parties for the century plant and both red and white camellias in the greenhouse.

"Mr. William Bailey took great pride in his camellias," Mrs. Codman said. "Occasionally he used to cut one for me with a little silver penknife. That was an honor that he seldom paid. He stopped paying it to me when he noticed that I was wearing just a nosegay of wild windflowers. Your father had brought them to me from the woods."

Meg could see why he had. Even years ago, Mrs. Codman must have had a fragile grace.

It seemed too bad, Meg felt, that she could not imagine her own father in his young, romantic days. But in her heart she was so glad she couldn't. Was that the way he'd truly been before he'd married late in life? Was it her mother who had stopped his picking nosegays and who had brought out all his humor that often saved the day for everybody in the house?

At any rate, Meg had the feeling of being someone very special. Mrs. Codman had hardly said a word to her companion, who had smiled across the table in a friendly way when questions had to do with what had happened very long ago.

It was she who was suggesting that Gid and Meg should leave the table when they had finished with dessert.

"You young people," she was saying, "should be outside enjoying the night view. We have our little game of solitaire to play inside."

"Meg and I are going to the summerhouse," Gid said. It was the first time that he'd spoken through the whole long meal.

Was it really right to leave when Mrs. Codman looked so wistful? At any rate there was no choice. Soon Meg and Gid had risen from the table and they had crossed the lawn beneath a vast, black spread of sky and were sitting in a latticed summerhouse built on a platform high above the tide and overlooking the whole eastern bay.

But what was the sense in sitting here forever and forever? After they hadn't seen each other for so many weeks, there should be things they liked to talk about. Not hops, though, and not cadets and dress parades and chaperons. Not intrigues and involvements. They would sound flat and thin and silly. Meg was wondering where to start when she was interrupted by Gid's voice.

"In only two more years I'll be through college," he was saying. "I'll be starting in the mills. In only three more years you'll be through college and be getting married. Both are awful. Especially getting married."

"At West Point they didn't think it was," Meg said. "That's all that anybody talked about."

"Then you met a lot of horrid people," Gid announced.

It was true that Cousin Caroline had seemed pretty horrid when she talked about a wedding. But marriage couldn't be the way Gid thought of it, not possibly. Why, even Grandma Simmons had rare moments when she said, "When I first went to housekeeping," as though she'd done it happily. And Meg had sometimes heard her mother say, "Before you children came," as though there had been a time when she hadn't minded being poor or anything because she'd been in love.

"It can't be horrid, Gid," Meg started off. "It's only that it's something we don't know about. But when people are in love, that's the only way that they can be alone together. That's the fun of it, I guess; being by themselves and shutting everybody out and building up a life that is just theirs. Nobody else's."

After a long silence, he was asking,

"Did you ever see a man you felt that way about?"

"No," she confessed, "not really. I pretended that I did. There was one man up at West Point that everybody thought was going to ask me. And he didn't. I truly didn't want him to. I was afraid he would. But that doesn't mean that I won't want to marry."

While she thought, her eyes were on the distant glow above Fall River. Then they sought the myriad twinkling lights that pricked the coastline as it stretched towards Tiverton. Way beyond, lay Little Compton that she hadn't seen all summer. Some day it would be nice to own a house there. But not one with its cellar blown from solid rock; not a great costly, ugly landmark like old Dr. Bogert's. Nor would it have a windswept porch where she'd have to sit all day waiting for a husband who was more than likely not to come. And when she had a son, he was going to grow up knowing all about the marsh plants and the shore birds, but he wouldn't want to own a gun and go out and kill to show his marksmanship.

Gid had been speaking on and she hadn't listened. From his tone of voice, she knew he was repeating.

"You'd be bound to be afraid of all the risks," he said.

"No," Meg said. "I wouldn't be. My mother wasn't. She knew she'd have to manage on my father's salary and it didn't stop her." Gid needn't be so lordly. "When you're used to being poor," she added, "it doesn't take so very much to start on."

"That isn't what I meant," Gid said.

But that was the only risk that people mentioned. There were the girls whose parents could afford to build them houses for a wedding present and the others who went right on getting their allowances. And there were some who started off like "church mice." That was the phrase that Cousin Belle applied to couples who began their married life by living on what she liked to call "some little cat-alley." Meg could hear her father saying that "a cat-alley" seemed the oddest place for church mice to select, but in reality it was merely off the fashionable streets, and the bride's new home was plenty big enough for two.

"I'd even live on the West Side," Meg said, "provided that I cared enough."

That was the most daring admission she could make. She couldn't think of any bride who'd been as brave as that.

But her challenge hadn't drawn a word from Gid. It was so dark that she couldn't see him, but she could feel him brooding near her.

"There's nothing to be scared of," she flung at him.

"Suppose you had to be afraid of having children?"

Having children. That was a subject that he shouldn't speak about. Even in *Sir Richard Calmody*, the "strongest" book that Meg had ever read, young Lady Calmody had been embarrassed in making a confession to her husband. Only after a long while had she brought herself to say, "You have given me a child," in a most moving scene. But if that was the sort of thing that Gid was bothering over, Meg could tell him what she had been told about it.

"Every woman's scared beforehand," she began. "Every woman's scared; then she forgets right afterwards. She's so happy she forgets. That always happens. I mean to have a lot of children. I used to wish that Mother had had more."

In the dark, she heard words catching in Gid's throat.

"I wish my mother'd never had a single one," he said.

There was a desperate loneliness about his voice that made him seem a long way off.

What could she find to say? Reading French books didn't help with this. Nobody in them was ever lonely. If anything there were too many characters who kept getting in each other's way.

Who were the loneliest people whom she knew? Grandpa Simmons, sitting in some shadowy corner where he wouldn't draw attention. But he was old. At least he'd had his life before he had been broken by misfortunes. So had Grandma Simmons before she'd cut herself away from everyone by bitterness. As for Mother, who had had more fun or more devotion? Father seemed awfully by himself at times. Never more so than right now, when Meg herself had been the one to hurt him. But after all, he could go out and stay with Cousin Julia.

Cousin Julia! Why, Meg wondered, hadn't she thought of her at once? Hadn't Cousin Julia told of how she'd thought she'd had to build her solitary life of sticks and straws and maybe mud until she'd watched a mud-wasp work and had decided that she wouldn't let one beat her when it came to making something? She was the one who'd talked so frankly about Gid. Oddities could do no harm, she'd said, when kept in an odd body. She had meant not daring to have children who mightn't be like other children.

The queer things that Meg had noticed all this afternoon came flooding back into her mind. And never mind the shock, she had to understand them now.

In the clear night air, she could hear her voice telling about Cousin Julia's kinship with her father, about the things the two of them had done together; things that had made their friendship rich, almost as rich as marriage.

"You and I could be like them," Meg said.

"No," Gid said. "We couldn't be like them. We couldn't be like them at all."

Still he was listening to her quietly and his voice had lost its savageness so that it was all right to ask, "Why couldn't we?"

"Because we couldn't be content with books and talks and flowers and reading poetry. In a way, all our lives we'll spoil things for each other. We won't mean to, but we'll do it. We're in each other's minds. We have been from the start. We won't want anybody else to get in them and know as much."

Was that true? Meg was wondering as they rose and left the summerhouse and crossed the lawn and headed for the light on the front porch.

Mrs. Codman didn't notice them or speak as they came into the parlor and sat down on a long chintz-covered sofa. At a square table near the fireplace where birch logs were crackling, she was busy playing solitaire. Her companion, Miss Brownell, was using a wide broad-fingered hand to make a fence along one edge.

But two cards had tumbled to the floor and the game couldn't come out right without them. Meg was about to pick them up when she saw Miss Brownell shake her head as though to show they didn't matter.

"This time," and Mrs. Codman was speaking like a fretful child, "This time I don't want any help. I want to get it by myself."

Her frail hands were moving here and there, picking up a card, laying it upon a pile, then removing it to try another. There was a kind of effort in each fluttering motion that made it seem directed by a tremendous will power. Then suddenly it was as though a delicate thin chain had snapped. An impatient sweep had made a clutter on the table.

"I want to get it once," Mrs. Codman said. "I have to get it once before I go to bed."

"You will," Miss Brownell promised with a soothing confidence. She gathered up the cards that were on the table and started in to deal again. Meg found herself still staring at the four of clubs and ace of diamonds as they lay face upwards on the floor.

Did this go on every single night? And did Gid have to sit and watch it? When did it ever end? Over and over it went right on happening.

At last Gid had risen and was interrupting nervously.

"Mother," he was saying. "Here is Meg. Meg Bailey, Professor Bailey's daughter. She's come down to spend the night with us."

Almost at once, Mrs. Codman had risen from her chair and had turned into a gracious hostess.

"I used to know your father," she was smiling faintly as she held out her hand in greeting.

"Yes," Meg said, "My father sent you his regards. He's often told me how he used to go off in the woods and gather windflowers for you."

Gid had given her a look of gratitude that made her want to cry, but out loud she was recalling every tiny thing she could remember and making promises of a long walk tomorrow when she wasn't quite so sleepy after her long train trip.

"I want to be the one to show Whit Bailey's daughter to her room," said Mrs. Codman.

Up the long flight of stairs they went and when they reached Meg's door, Mrs. Codman kissed her.

"Sleep well," she said. "In my house, I want you to sleep well."

As though Meg could. Long after she had gone to bed, she still kept thinking. In her mind there was the look that Gid had given her. And there was the image of a delicate shell brooch and a heap of scattered playing cards and a pair of managng broad hands that kept on dealing. On and on and on . . .

CHAPTER XXX

This year, Meg was glad to get back to Bryn Mawr where there was no tug on her affections. She liked the courses she was taking in German, English and Philosophy; and in hours outside of work, somebody kept turning up.

At the present moment, sitting on the box seat of the single room which Meg now had in Merion Hall, Peggy Ayer who had one eyebrow cocked, was laughing at her. "Miss Bailey is so very native," Peg was saying in imitation of the voice that spoke authoritatively on the Romantic Poets.

"Why do you have to be so native, Magsy?" Peggy was persisting. "Do my papers sound as though I had been born and brought up in the Corn Belt?"

Meg had grown used to Peggy's wheedling. It had begun some months ago when Peggy had marched in the door and made herself at home as though there was no question of her welcome. "I'm not going to be collegiate any longer," she had said. "I'm never going to lead another cheer or hurl another basketball. I'm going to be Miss Donnalley's pet pedant and be very British. That's letting you behind the scenes. I wouldn't do it if I didn't want you for a friend."

"Would you guess," Peggy was saying, "that I'd ever smelled the stockyards in Chicago? No, you wouldn't. You'd think that I'd grown up among the Trossachs and had gazed at Rydal Mount from infancy and passed Dove Cottage on my way to school. Yes, and that I'd 'wandered lonely as a cloud' around the Lake Country, except, of course, for the society of William Wordsworth."

"But I've never seen the Lake Country," Meg put in.

"No more have I," said Peggy. "You don't suppose that I could get my mother to set foot in it. I'm afraid that Mother's what Miss Donnalley would call 'too urban.' She likes her Bond Street and her Berkeley Square. She doesn't want to visit Tintern Abbeys. But I don't have to visit them to lend my writing an authentic note. You don't either."

"Yes, I do," Meg said.

She could put her finger on the trouble though she couldn't help it. Even when she read *The Daffodils* which she had learned was "one of the more obvious poems," she saw the yellow trumpets that grew in her front garden bed on Cushing Street. When she read *The Lesser Celandine*, she saw its tiny golden flowers and wilting leaves as Gid had picked it on the Maxcey's bank when they were children. Miss Donnalley was right. She was "so very native." Everything she read was much more real if she could relate it to a world she knew.

"Anyhow," said Peggy, "you could do a lot about this room. It looks as though the Sage of Concord might drop in or Harriet Beecher Stowe or any of the fuddy-duddies that we're not supposed to mention. No Oxford Don would feel that he could take his tea here."

"There isn't any Oxford Don to take his tea," Meg said.

"No, but there's going to be." Peggy sounded smug. "Wait till our Bertie Russell comes out to the States."

"Who's he?" Meg asked.

"The Don of Dons. The honorable Bertrand. He'd rather be a Don than be a peer," Peggy explained. "He's glad that he's a younger son and he has the quaintest fancies about marriage and the social structure. He told Miss Donnalley all about them while she was dwelling near the Oxford cloisters and she says that she's afraid he is a little naughty. But when he comes to lecture here, she's going to bring him to my 'flat' to show him that the Byrn Mawr undergraduate is not too hopelessly uncivilized."

With that, Peggy was off to her own single suite in Pembroke East. She had done a thorough job in making it look mellow with old English prints and calf-bound volumes and glazed chintz. There were no traces of Chicago left except her father's photograph in a round black oval frame hung near her desk.

Well, Meg felt, she didn't have to brew tea for the Honorable Bertrand or for anybody but the friends that she was busy making. For the first time in her life, she wasn't lonely and she had a room all of her own.

It was one that no one else would covet. The Quakers who had first lived in Merion had only needed books and not a closet. Now

an ugly wardrobe had to do. A brick fireplace cut across one corner. The wall paper was a faded silvery blue, marked with bluer squares and ovals that her pictures were too small to cover and the shiny baseboard and the trimmings were molasses brown. But a bookcase ran along one wall and held all the books she owned, mostly those her father had given her. And near the double window overlooking the wide western campus was a stout kitchen table big enough to write at; and in front of it there was a kitchen chair that was stout too. Everything the room contained was hers. Especially the space. She could hang a cardboard placard on the door and keep everybody out.

Now that she could, she didn't often want to. The girls who came, came on purpose to see her. There was no other reason for them to drop in.

And this year Meg had got her bearings and was interested in people; even in those with whom she knew she'd never be so very intimate. She sat thinking of them in the dusk.

Right next to her lived Anna Haines, the Quaker, a person of some bulk and a light tread and inner dignity. Deep in her mind was the serenity with which she dealt with others and kept herself a little bit aloof from them. Meg loved to lend her books. When she did, Anna returned them with a little scrap of paper that said "Thank thee." That was all, but it was like a quiet little benediction that lay waiting on the desk.

Then there was Ann Young, who had no serenity at all since a girl had been expelled for plagiarism. That had been a dreadful time. First Miss Hoyt had read a theme that described the quiet coiling of a snake before it struck. Then someone had called out, "That's Kala Nag. It's taken from the *Jungle Book*." "I'm glad that at least I knew enough to give it a straight A," Miss Hoyt had said and she had tried to pass the matter off. At least she had begged to be the one allowed to deal with it. But the Self-Gov. Student Officers had insisted that it came within their realm. In caps and gowns they'd met and met behind closed doors and when they had filed out, they had looked cruel and excited and had reminded Meg of Hawthorne's tales of Salem witch-hunters. Right on the doors of Taylor Hall they had posted public notices of the girl's name and her expulsion and she had had to leave.

The whole affair had been most sobering to everyone. But Ann Young still had a panic over everything she wrote. "Not orig." she printed on the top of every page in bright red ink and she came bolting in to have Meg read her themes though nothing that Meg said assuaged her really. Ann was forever going through old books to prove she was a plagiarist and to convict herself.

Stella Haskins, who lived in Merion, too, Meg did avoid. "This is the happiest time in our whole lives," Stella would say with a bracket round her mouth and a furrow like a pencil line between her eyebrows. She was an inconvenient neighbor because she did so love to run all sorts of errands for the Seniors that she made them think that Meg was surly. Besides, she kept explaining Meg to everyone. "You only have to understand her," she would say.

Popey, Meg liked much better. Meg loved to listen when Popey told about the Baptist Parsonage; particularly when she told about the dining room that had an enormous Webster's Dictionary on a stand close to the dinner table. At the end of meals, Popey's mother doled out one long word and was delighted if her daughter got the better of her brothers who were college graduates. Quietly and stealthily Mrs. Pope had saved the fees from parsonage weddings for a college education for her daughter. It was her secret way of taking sides about a question that could not be mentioned in strict Baptist circles. In the upper drawer of her black walnut bureau, she kept a picture that was labelled "Votes for Women" and that showed a little white-haired lady with the funny name of Carrie Chapman Catt. "She's going to influence your whole life," she'd say to Popey. "There are a million women like myself who are only waiting for the time to rise and cast their yokes off." When Popey reached that point, she meant for everyone to laugh at the thought of the United States all cluttered up with women's cast-off yokes.

Popey, despite her solemn, handsome, dark-browed face, was fun; but the friends who were becoming closest to Meg lived outside of Merion in other halls.

Louise Foley had a whole suite to herself in Pembroke East and lived in it like a little pampered Persian kitten in a padded satin basket. She wore a topaz brooch to match her tawny hair and had the softest, most luxurious furs and the loveliest clothes. It

was difficult to be convinced that she had had hard-bitten and hard-drinking squires for ancestors. Moreover they had had the habit of marrying ladies of proud ancestry and great romantic beauty who had borne the names of Sheila and Dierdre and been savage Catholics. And always these ladies had expired in bringing forth what Louise referred to as "a man-child." Though the Foleys had come from Ireland to St. Paul, Minnesota, they had brought across the sea the doom that lay in wait for every woman of their race. Louise herself was going to die in bringing forth a man-child too.

"How you can stand that kind of guff," Carola would often say to Meg. "Before you know it you'll be talking of 'the little people' and be seeing leprechauns behind a fern or toadstool."

Carola with a passion hated Irish poetry.

"I went with you once to Taylor Hall," she'd said, "to see old Erin's harp get twanged by a seedy-looking daughter of Brian Go-Brach. You needn't think I'm going to sit through the long dronings of a poet by the name of William Butler Yeats."

Meg had gone alone and been enthralled. She could still see Yeats standing up before his audience, very slim and tall in a long sable cloak that matched the sable lock of hair that drooped down on his brow and that intensified the waxy pallor of his face and slender hands. He had looked like a very black and very white crayon portrait of himself and not like a man of flesh and blood. And he had read his poems or rather sung them. "By the incantations of this verse" was a phrase that he'd made real to her. Louise Foley, who had happened to sit next to her, had realized that she was spellbound and had asked her to her rooms to hear her read old Irish songs. Occasionally she tried a poem that was her very own. Then out of an imagination that seemed lush, poured rhythms that were pure and true and clear.

Those were what Terry Helburn also wanted from her; Terry, who was quick and competent and witty, but ruthless about many things. Bluntly she told Louise of her indifference to what she called "the endless Celtic twilight." She herself was going in for drama, for realistic drama, and she meant to be very sordid and deal with ugly situations that should stand the light of day.

Bluntly she dealt with Meg when she was casting a new play.

Few, Terry said, could hope to walk on what she termed "the boards," by which she seemed to mean the stage down in the Gym.

All the same, she was, Meg knew, one of her few friends who had an interest in the things she wrote and who took the time to make a keen if a perplexing comment. The very themes that got a scathing criticism from authorities were the ones that Terry liked the best.

"I have asked for a dramatic incident," Meg could hear Miss Katharine Fullerton saying, "and Miss Bailey's leading character sits staring at two playing cards that have been dropped by an old, fuddled lady who is busy with her game of solitaire. Nobody even rises from a chair."

"Nobody should," Meg had heard Terry sputtering in the seat beside her. "Does no one on the faculty know that the time is coming right on Broadway when characters will sit through a whole act and let their thoughts give all the drama? They will some day when I'm a theatre manager."

Terry a theatre manager on Broadway. That world of flickering lights and dazzling signs and utter unreality. Meg had seldom seen, but she knew Augustin Daly ruled it. He and Daniel Frohman and a newer figure called Belasco whose pictures in the newspapers showed a man with snow-white hair and a white collar turned the wrong way to and a clergyman's black cassock vest. Belasco was the one who tried out plays in Philadelphia that the undergraduates were not supposed to go to town and see. Before Terry vied with him, she'd have to do much more than rise and cast off a woman's yoke.

Still Terry's independence gave a sort of independence to those whom she collected round her. She was the one who made them write just for each other and who kept them trying out experiments that they wouldn't dare to show to their professors. Once a fortnight she rounded them all up and made them read what they had done.

And while she showed respect for Hortense Flexner's orthodox, fine sonnets, she never laughed at Hilda Doolittle when she said solemnly, "This is a poem," although it had no rhyme at all to make it poetry and often was a series of names of places and of

islands that followed on each other, one by one. And when Marianne Moore came in, with hair like a bright flame and a whole sheaf of papers on which she had set down a single image, Terry stopped all criticism by saying that each thought expressed was as round as a clear drop of water and as quick. Alice Gerstenberg, Terry claimed, had got hold of something new and vital when she wrote a one-act play in which the characters spoke what they were truly thinking in their minds right after what they said out loud to other people. "Some day," Terry had announced, "a real playwright will be using that idea. You wait." But no one else was in the least excited. A real play could never be like that.

It was because of Terry though, Meg knew, that she herself was busy with two kinds of stories. There were the ones she thought up for Miss Katharine Fullerton who taught Narrative Writing. To win approval, these stories had to end with what that aloof and sophisticated and bewildering lady referred to as "the full turn of the screw." Meg had learned the trick. First she read a lot of Henry James until she caught a little of the phrasing. Then she thought up a situation where people didn't understand a thing about each other. Then she made them all use language that she didn't understand herself by the time that she had finished with rewriting it. At the close the most sensitive and wounded spirit always felt that he had preserved a very rare and special silence that was his secret triumph. Finally she got a nice vague title from the Bible, a title that would cover any situation. "The Gold of the Temple" had really been a find. She had dropped that story in the box at Taylor Hall quite certain it would get High Credit. After doing that, she had come home to work for Terry, who preferred the characters whom the person writing of them really knew.

So did old Dr. Holden when Meg sent some papers to him at West Point. She had tried him on both kinds and under a good mark, he had often scribbled, "Bosh." But under what she had done for fun he had once scrawled, "Too real for my enjoyment. This, with my compliments." She had thought that he would like her sketch of Captain Kiley showing her his little trophies, but all she had received had been the two words "Feline cruelty." It was to her portraits of her Grandma Simmons that Dr. Holden gave

the highest praise she ever got. "Good," he had put down in red pencil. "Compassionate and good."

Compassionate meant merciful; and how Grandma Simmons would hate mercy. But at least an account of her had made Dr. Holden write a letter in which he'd said, "You show some signs of growing up."

About Miss Fullerton's comments, Meg was never very sure. That she didn't always fool that critic was quite certain. "Come, come, Miss Bailey," would sometimes be the one remark made in the margin of a story. But once under the word "Excellent," Miss Fullerton had put, "May I venture to suggest that you change the figures in your carpet?" What on earth had that meant? What had she meant by her very latest comment: "You remain perennially young and prematurely old"? That didn't seem so very flattering, but how could anybody alter what she didn't understand?

No, Miss Fullerton was never like Miss Hoyt, who made it clear to Meg that she was being stupid; stupid in her handling of a written argument, but stupidest when she was settled in a wicker basket chair at Low Buildings and having tea. Inevitably something would come up that showed her depths of ignorance. "What? Not know the word, gargantuan?" Meg could hear Miss Hoyt saying fretfully. "But every cultivated person knows gargantuan. What, you've never heard of Bossuet? Then how happens it that you have chanced on Stendhal and Chantepleuve? And if your father is the well-read person that you seem to think he is, why has he left you unaware of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes or of the beauty of *Urn Burial*?" Time and again, she sent Meg back to Merion with a book bound in the loveliest leather and with a book plate in the front.

"Why you go to see the woman," Carola would often say. "All she seems to do is to make fun of you."

But it wasn't all, not by a long shot. A little bit Meg went because she loved the things about the crowded cluttered room; a silver mirror that had been picked up in Florence or a bit of Chelsea on the mantelpiece or an old engraving or a pair of Georgian candlesticks. Each had been purchased on a whim and from the moment of possession had become an object which its owner spoke of as extremely rare.

More, however, Meg knew she went to see Miss Hoyt because with every cuffing, she got a personal interest that seemed warm and genuine. Miss Hoyt really cared about her getting the high marks that at home were taken so for granted. "But how very dull of you," she'd say if Meg didn't get at least a credit in Philosophy or German. She set a very special standard. Not that she wanted it related to responsibilities about the future. "Get some pleasure from your mind," she'd say. "Don't treat it like a hack-horse." And when Meg said that it would have to be a hack-horse when she finished college, she would be told that was the very reason why she ought to let it gallop now.

To let it gallop, Miss Hoyt would sometimes take her into town to see a play with her. Not Ethel Barrymore in *Barrie*. Whimsy made her very, very ill. But though the Shavian might not be as clever as he thought, *Man and Superman* was of the times and something that Meg ought to see. And so was *Candida*, even though Meg laughed at the wrong lines and was moved by the wrong moments, and never thought the plays were comedies—not really. Shaw was an influence she mustn't miss.

Meg was thinking of Miss Hoyt and all her varied bounty when she heard a knock. As she switched on the light, in came Carola. Something had embarrassed her, and she never was embarrassed unless she had to hide her feelings. Meg was scared even before she saw the yellow telegram that Carola was now holding in her hand.

"I send lots of these," Carola said. "I send one to my mother every single week. All I say is just 'With love, Carola.' It's much easier than writing letters and it does the trick. I don't believe this means an earthly thing but I was downstairs in the hall when I heard the delivery boy call out your name. I told him he could wait and that I'd bring it up."

Never in her life had Meg been a figure of enough importance to get one of these terrifying yellow envelopes. But she knew they only dealt with death or real disaster. With a shaky hand, she tore the fly leaf and read the few typewritten words.

"COME HOME AT ONCE, I NEED YOU, MOTHER."

"Well, at least nobody's dead," she heard Carola say across her shoulder.

"No," Meg said, "but something awful must have happened in the family. Otherwise my mother would have stopped to think I didn't have the money for the train trip."

Already Carola had dragged out a suitcase from the wardrobe and was busy dumping into it the things she thought that Meg would need to take with her.

"Get on your hat and coat," she said. "Don't stand there looking like a ninny. I'll go back and grab some money for you. There's bound to be a sleeper out of Philadelphia. You've got loads of time to make it."

Then of a sudden, she was standing with her back against the door.

"Listen," she was saying. "No matter what's the trouble you're to come back here and go through college. You're not to get all mushy and soft-hearted. If they want you to stay home and say they can't afford to have you finish, I'll find you jobs and you can work your way. Or I'll loan you what you need and you can pay me back. Will you remember?"

"I won't forget. Not ever."

"Then I'll go and get the money for your ticket and meet you downstairs in the hall."

In a second she was off. Soon Meg had started with her bag.

CHAPTER XXXI

Above the leafless branches of the elms, there was one pale yellow bar of dawn off to the east. As Meg reached Cushing Street and got out of the hack, the house looked very blank. She had expected to see someone watching for her from the window; but since no one was, she got out her key and let herself into the dark front hall.

Still there was nobody around. Not Bridget setting out the breakfast dishes; not Grandpa "burning gas" out in the dining room, beginning the day as early as he did because he had been taught that only sluggards slept till there was daylight.

Opposite the landing, Grandma's door was closed, but beyond

it the dim woodwork framed an oblong space that led to the room where Meg had always slept.

"I'm here," she said and went inside.

Her mother had not answered. She was lying very stiff and straight in the wide bed. When she spoke, her voice was filled with fright.

"Your father's lost his job," she said. "Brown doesn't want him any longer."

Not want Father in his scarlet academic gown that stood out at Commencements. Not want him with all of his degrees from colleges and universities. Besides, he'd founded his department, hadn't he? Why, he'd built it up so that the Government drew on it when it demanded well-trained scientists.

"Why don't they want him?" Meg asked as she sat down on the bed.

"Because he's old. Because he's old and sick. Because he's had to cut so many of his classes." Her mother spoke in one flat tone. "For weeks I've known that this would happen. You can't blame the Trustees for telling him it's time that he retired."

"But he's an ornament," Meg said, "to any college."

"Nobody keeps ornaments." Her mother's voice was bitter. "They're too expensive in this lofty, academic world that we're supposed to live in. It's no loftier than any other world. If anything, it's less so. We're not supposed to need the money that ordinary people need to live on. When a man has served his purpose then they cast him out. That's just good sense."

"It's not good sense," Meg flamed. "It's not good sense at all. Father's given his whole life to teaching. Nobody ever was a better teacher, and not in science only. He's spread ideas. He's wakened them in minds that didn't have any. Why, when men come back to their reunions they make a point of seeing him and telling him how much he's influenced their lives. Doesn't the college owe him anything for that?"

"Only in words and silver loving cups," her mother said. "The Faculty all clubbed together and gave him a small loving cup. From the way he values it, you'd think it was going to keep us going."

"What do the Trustees think he's going to live on?"

"That," her mother said, "is not their business. They'll say he's had a lazy life and that he's had his summer and short hours and time enough for lecturing and outside tutoring. They'll trump up a thousand dollars as a pension and think they're being generous. In that way they'll salve their consciences and be let off from any further thought about him. But with all of you to care for, what ever shall I do?"

"Hide when the collector comes," was Meg's instantaneous thought. For a moment she felt like the little girl who'd once sat on the Maxceys' bank and watched for those enemies against whom they'd had to be on guard. But now she knew they couldn't hide away from debts that were inexorable. What's more, ever since her Mother had started to teach school and had stopped having bills at any store, there had been a pride in watching her as she settled up the week's accounts. "There," she'd say. "We don't owe a penny in the world." She spoke in a victorious way as she paid off every little bill on Saturday night.

Not for anything must they slip back from that clean decency of living. But even with a thousand-dollar pension and the money that she earned in Boston, how was she going to fend for all the family?

As Meg searched her mind, she stumbled on an ugly question that appalled her. Grandma and Grandpa Simmons. It wasn't that they cost so much. But why did they have to go on living forever and forever? Without them, her mother could leave Cushing Street and move into a smaller house and cut down in lots of ways.

As though her mother read these thoughts, she said,

"Your Grandpa Simmons wanted me to let him sell shoe-laces on a street corner. Can't you see him doing it in every sort of weather and being only meek when people didn't buy from him? He'd do it too and bring me back a little pile of change to count. He almost broke my heart."

"Mine too." Meg wanted to cry out. She couldn't bear to think of Grandpa's peddling little bobbins that nobody bought except from charity and trudging home with a small heap of change.

"My uncle's rich enough to help," Meg begged. "You could write him that he should support his parents."

Her mother shook her head with its pale braids of hair that were growing moonlight-colored in the dawn.

"If he can't do it of his own accord," she said, "then I won't ask him. I'd rather that we starved. Besides, any help I took from him would kill your grandmother. As it is, I found her standing in her nightgown by a window flung wide open. She announced that she hoped to get 'lung fever.' I have to watch her. I made her promise that she'd wait till after you got home."

Why, Meg wondered, should anybody wait for *her*? What use was she to anyone with a college course half finished?

"If I could just scrape through this year," her mother was continuing. "The publishers will advance me something on my textbook and next year it will be selling. If I pinch and scrape, I'll have about enough to run things here and put your brother through his art school. It's you who are the problem."

As Meg listened, she knew that something eager in her was struck dead. Before her mother added the next words, she knew what they would be.

"I simply can't afford Bryn Mawr. You'll have to give it up and stay at home."

Give up Bryn Mawr! It could be as British as it liked, Meg thought. But if she only could go back, she'd do all the things she'd spurned. She'd go out on the campus drenched with dew and dance in drabbled skirts around a Maypole and pretend she didn't think it was a false and silly custom. She'd salute the dawning of the first of May with a carol sung on the highest turret of the new Gothic Library. She'd use British words and show class spirit. There was only one thing that she wouldn't do. She would not give up Bryn Mawr without a fight.

"If you don't have to pay for me at all," she asked, "then you could manage somehow?"

As her mother nodded, Meg thought of Popey's mother seeing to it that her daughter quite as much as her two sons should have a college education. Then she thought of Carrie Chapman Catt, who could show a million women how to rise and cast their yokes off. Meg was going to cast hers off right now. She could see Carola braced against a door exacting promises about her coming back and about not getting mushy and softhearted,

giving the stout assurance of jobs a girl could do to earn her way, promising assistance that could be paid back off in time.

"If it's only me you're worried over, then I mean to work my way through college. You won't have to spend a penny on me," Meg said in a firm voice.

"You can't do that," her mother said. "You'd never have the strength to do it."

"I will," Meg said. "The worst that work can do to me is to tone down my color."

"You don't have to be so hard."

"Yes, in a way," Meg said, "I do."

For almost the first time in her life she knew that her own determination was the stronger. Wasn't her health her very own to use? Even if she squandered it, it wasn't anybody else's. So was her way of living hers, provided that she paid for it. So were her friends. Carola wouldn't fail her; and if the others did, that was, Meg felt, her own affair. It was a failure that would touch nobody else.

"Now that we've settled that," she heard herself concluding, "I'm going up to see my father. I want to see him before breakfast. I want to see him by myself."

In some curious way, Meg felt that she had become another person free of a bondage that she had accepted always without question. But it took all the courage that she had to go up to her father's study. She didn't want to see him looking at her humbly. She couldn't bear to have him feel humiliated and a failure. He was an ornament to Brown, no matter what they did about him. For years and years, he'd been an ornament. She must make him very sure of that.

"Daddy, darling," she called out as she reached his study door and knocked.

"'Here I in sorrow sit,'" she heard him say. It was like him to quote Shakespeare even in a crisis. But who cared? In a moment she was in his arms.

Affection first was what he needed. She was doing what she'd never done with ease, laying her cheek to his and allowing it to rest there. He was the first to lift his head and stop her long embrace.

"I wanted you to go through college," he was saying. "I've been so proud of your good marks in English. Your mind is reaching out. What I mind the worst, I think, is having it cut off from the contact with ideas."

"It isn't going to be cut off," Meg said.

While she was explaining, she sat looking at him. He had on his shabby, old brown dressing gown, and at first glance he seemed the same. For years his hair had been as white. So had his eyebrows. But his gray, almost childlike eyes weren't trustful any longer and they'd lost their humor. His features were more sharply cut and there was a deeper grooving around his mouth. Her mother had said he had been sick. Had the deeper grooving come from pain or bitterness, or both?

"Daddy," she began, "ever since I can remember, everybody's felt that they could come to you with questions. I can't remember any walk we ever took when someone didn't stop you on the street and want to know about a plant of some sort. I never knew you once to make them feel ridiculous even when you had to say that what they asked about was just a common dandelion. No matter what it was, you treated ignorance with dignity. Being courteous like that for a whole lifetime is something that nobody can take away."

"No one cares," he spoke in a low voice.

"I care," she said. "I care like anything. I used to be ashamed when some old, seedy-looking person came here to the house and you took him to your study and treated him like royalty. Now it makes me very proud. It makes me proud to know of all the people whom you've taught, for nothing. You've never hoarded knowledge. Not once ever. That's a record, isn't it?"

For a moment her pride in him had stirred a pride that answered back.

"I'd have to live my life that way again," he said, "if I had to live it over. But the sort of person that I am has no earthly business to take on a family."

"He has," Meg stated with conviction. "He does things for them that aren't things to do with money. If I ever teach, I'm going to teach your way."

"You'll marry," her father said. "Fervently I hope you will."

You mustn't think that marriage is like what you've seen of it. I'm still convinced it can be happy. I still believe it can be rich, rich in companionship."

Back of his words lay all the loneliness of the years he'd spent up here on the third floor far from her mother. But mixed with the loyalty she had for him, there was her other loyalty.

"Mother's been gallant too. She's shouldered all of us. Grandma and Grandpa Simmons; she's done her best to make them feel they weren't a burden. Whitman and me; she's worked herself to death to give us all the things that other children had; silly things like dancing school and music lessons."

"No one ever said your mother wasn't gallant," Meg's father interrupted. "She is. She always has been. But gallantry can be the hardest thing on earth to live with. Now that everything is going to fall on her, I don't see how I'm going to keep my head up. No man could. It's not his nature."

"But you have your pension; you won't be dependent."

"It's not enough to give me any dignity," he said.

Meg knew well what he meant. There would be times of rain and sleet with her mother out in them, going back and forth to Boston and with Grandmother remarking upon men who felt that they could sit at home and read when their wives were braving all the elements. There was nothing happy in the picture.

"There's one slim chance, but it's a mighty slim one," she was surprised to hear her father say.

"Would you care to tell me what it is?" Not for worlds would she intrude upon his privacy.

"Yes." He spoke as though he wanted dreadfully to talk to someone. "I'd rather that you didn't tell your mother. You see, she'd want to have me do things her way and I've never been much good at pulling wires. Besides the whole plan's new. It may blow up and that would mean fresh disappointment. To speak honestly, I haven't got much faith in my connection with it."

"What is the plan?" Meg broke in eagerly.

"It seems," her father said, "that there's a little Scotsman out in Pittsburgh who thinks professors need a hand. He wants to be the one to lend it. God knows why. He's spent his life in building up a whacking fortune out of steel. But he's set up a

pension fund that bears his name. The Carnegie Foundation is what it's called now that it has a Board of Managers. Mostly they're bigwigs from the business world, but they have some college presidents to steer them on their choice of applicants. That's where the rub comes in. What chance have I among the raft of men who'll be applying?"

"Then you have applied?" Meg asked.

"I sent my record in," her father said, "but it seemed poor pickings when set down on paper."

She could imagine just how brief and colorless he'd made it. "Botanist" he would have put, and then M.A. from Brown and then an LL.D. with the name of the college or the university that had conferred it. But the reasons why they had, had been left out. He was incapable of playing up himself.

But there was another record; one that she could patch together from the tales that he had told her when she was a little girl. What of the hazards that he'd run for Asa Gray, setting off alone and scouring the ravines of the White Mountains or the Appalachians for some special little moss or lichen? If her father's searches did seem silly to the world, they hadn't to Professor Gray. Because of them, Professor Gray had recommended her father as a botanist and had sent him on that wild Nevada expedition led by Clarence King, himself the wildest of adventurers.

What Meg could remember having loved the best had been descriptions of tiny alpine plants unseen before by any man and growing way way up in the Sierras. But it was something to have set sail for San Francisco first and then to have had to make one's way on muleback over narrow trails that skirted precipices and often were brought up by landslides. It was something to have cared so much for science that it seemed worth the risk of life to make one small discovery that had no value save to other scientists and to oneself. Clarence King had said so in the thick black volumes that she had only glanced through. And in the years that had followed that Nevada Expedition, hadn't there been islands like Block Island that her father had covered for the Government? If she only could set down her father's patient, lonely searches, she could make known the pure, high passion that he had for Botany.

Here was one time, however, when she couldn't try to imitate the language of "the Master." At the thought of it, she smiled.

Her father had seen her smiling and he was perplexed.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Thoughts that come over me like Grandpa's." She spoke quickly. "I had one that just came."

"You mean you think it sounds absurd for me to dare to hope I might find favor with the Board of Mr. Carnegie's?"

"No, Daddy, no," she was protesting. "I was smiling only at the picture that you'd make triumphant in your scarlet robes and lording it a little over all of us."

But that was not the picture that she had in mind. Suppose she wrote about him as he truly was. Suppose she set down very simply what she knew about his scientific life and its adventures. If she sent it to the Board of Managers, would they discount it just because she was his daughter? Worse yet, might it even work against him? If there was only someone who would give her council . . .

In a flash, she knew there was. She could hear old Dr. Holden say about her father, "Range yourself with him. You won't be sorry." She could ask Dr. Holden for advice and she could send him her account. He'd be as secret as the grave and he'd stop her bluntly if he thought that she was being meddlesome and harmful.

"Don't set your hopes too high," her father's voice was warning her. "And remember, not a word of this downstairs to anyone. Your mother mustn't stand another disappointment."

"No," Meg promised. "I'll remember and be careful. But I'm going to set my hopes high. And if I could, I would pull wires just like Mother. I'd pull every wire that I could lay my hands on."

"Would you? I expect you would."

As he spoke, for the first time he really smiled at her. But he hadn't told her that he wished she wouldn't. He was saying "Go back to Bryn Mawr if you think that you can swing it. Don't risk your health, but that's all you need to think of. I'll be far happier knowing that you're there. You're not to be concerned for me."

CHAPTER XXXII

"I hoped you'd send for me," Gid said as he stood in the front hall. "My father told me what was happening. He did try to use his influence at Brown. It didn't work, but I'll remember that he tried."

Then, as though there was no question of the proper place for them to talk with any privacy, Meg had slipped on a heavy coat and Gid and she had gone down her front steps and crossed the street.

After being shut all winter long, the picket gate to the old Maxcey house had sagged and was hard to wedge back on its hinges. The terraced banks were gutted from the long March rains and the narrow garden beds along the walk were covered with wet, soggy leaves. But already there were blood-red thorns on the old briar roses and when they reached the porch where a mat of last year's honeysuckle vines shut out whatever wind there was, they could sit down in a patch of sun that had begun to warm as well as shine.

Here, it wasn't hard to tell Gid what had happened in the family. It was right here that she always had confided troubles that had bothered her, especially back in the years when Gid and she had started to grow up.

Besides, no matter how badly she was putting things, Gid would never see her father as humiliated and disgraced. While she stumbled on, Gid, too, she knew, was seeing the childlike yet distinguished figure that walked about the streets of Providence, intent on his own scientific purposes, unaware of his appearance, and always courteous to anyone who stopped him on his way.

"They could have done it without hurting him. Now he doesn't think he's ever mattered to a soul," Meg cried.

"I'm only one and I don't count," Gid said. "But think of all the people who are grateful to him."

Gid's face was turned away so that she only saw his clean-cut profile that seemed haughtier than his full face when he was dealing with a matter that he didn't like. But actually he was recalling

many of the walks he'd had with her father, the plants they'd found, the hours they'd spent in spreading them and overhauling them, the whole long rich companionship that had begun how many years ago?

"Suppose I hadn't thought he was a tramp and called out names at him," Gid said.

"Suppose," Meg said, "that he'd never opened up his old tin botany case and shown you the red pitcher plant."

Gid's hand slid on to hers and then slid off again in quick embarrassment. "That was the pitcher plant that he wouldn't let me have. It was the one that he was taking home to you. But since then I owe him for a lot. You won't have to worry over my not looking after him. I can't do much and maybe he won't want me bothering him. But after you go back, I'll drop in every day."

Meg was glad of that. But what she truly wanted was Gid's help in dealing with her mother and that she wasn't half so sure about.

"Of course she's brave," he'd say. "But that doesn't mean she's just. When it comes to you, she isn't. Some day I'm going to march right in and tell her so."

Hadn't there been times when it had been all that Meg could do to calm him down and hold him back from making matters worse?

Yet as though from sheer perversity, her mother liked Gid for standing out against her will. She liked his lordliness and a commandeering air he had with her. If he announced that he was to do a certain thing, she listened to him. She might even listen to him and stop thinking Meg was merely being disagreeable if he said that she was right in going back to college and in somehow getting through Bryn Mawr.

"Only don't be cross to her," Meg begged. "She doesn't mean to be unfair to me. She wouldn't be if she could help it possibly. But when there's not enough for both, she can't help thinking of my brother first. Mothers always do. It's like a law that always works and there's no use quarreling with laws. Only make her see that I'm not interfering with her plans or being any burden to her. Make her understand that I have the right to go to college if I earn my way."

"Earn your way." Gid had turned and it was Meg who'd drawn his fire. "You can't do that. You couldn't possibly."

"I can," she said as she drove her hands down in the pockets of her coat. "Besides, it isn't what I want to talk about."

"It's what we're going to talk about. It's what we're going to settle first of all." Gid spoke in a decisive voice. "You don't know what it's like even for boys who try to do it. They have to wait on table and wash dishes and do all sorts of menial things. They crash their health and they get stuck for cash. They start to sponge. Not all of them of course. Just some of them. For a girl, it would be even worse. It's something you're not going to do."

"I am," Meg answered fiercely. "If you don't want to talk to Mother, never mind. It doesn't really matter. I'll go back anyhow."

"If you feel like that," he said, "then I suppose you will. But why? When you were down at Bristol, you told me that you meant to marry. You don't suppose that I've forgotten. If that's what you mean to do, then what's the sense in all this college education?"

Suppose she talked to him about the academic courses that she wanted so to take? She would sound like the most awful prig and the sort of excitement he would never understand. Except on Botany when did he settle down and use his mind? And suppose she talked about her Bryn Mawr friends? If he met Carola, how he'd hate her. He'd be on the other side of all her labor problems and if he knew she meant to deal with vice, he wouldn't think that she was even decent. In one way and another, he'd hate every Bryn Mawr friend Meg had, and say that they believed in the most awful bunk and that she was much better off among the girls she knew at home. And suppose she said how much she'd grown to love the campus with its turrets and its dusky cloisters? To that, she surely knew the answer. Anybody from Rhode Island ought to march straight off a campus that tried to put on British airs.

Now that Meg glanced at him, Gid sat staring at a row of poplars that were like broken, scraggly witches' brooms stuck up against the skyline. When he looked her way at last, she knew that he was ill at ease. His strange, light eyes were serious, but his

smile was wavery and uncertain as it always was when he apologized.

"I've got money of my own," he said.

Of course he had; but it was something that Meg had never heard him mention; and this seemed the oddest time for him to choose.

"I don't see what your money's got to do with anything," she said.

"It could have a lot to do with things." His voice was still unsure. "There are fellows that I help through Brown; fellows I don't give a darn about."

Meg knew the kind and some of them she'd met. They thought he was an easy mark and borrowed from him and imposed upon him. They tried to flatter him and then made fun of him behind his back. Often enough she had been scornful of them.

"I'd much rather help someone I was fond of," he continued.

So that was what he had in mind.

"But I'm not a fellow, Gid," she said.

"Suppose you're not. What of it?" he was asking almost angrily.

What of it? There was all the difference in the world.

"Men don't ever give girls money," she protested. "Not unless the girls are bad." She paused and then added. "In books, it's always the first step."

"Who's talking of first steps? We're not in dirty books." Now he was really angry with her. "I don't see why you have to lug in trash and cheapness when we're sitting on the Maxceys' porch."

It did seem pretty cheap when put like that. No novel that she'd ever brooded over had a thing to do with talks they'd had here. Meg could think of questions that she'd put him; questions that would shame her now and might have at the time but for the simple answers that he'd given.

And always while they'd talked, they had gazed off at the same view. A strong easy-blowing wind was running through the crowns of trees and stirring their top branches; and beyond them lay the city, dimmed at times by deep blue shadows from the blustery clouds, then sharpened suddenly by razor flashes of March sunlight. This was a view that they two had shared in every

season and in every sort of weather and it was so much a part of their joint recollections that it was a view they musn't spoil.

"If I do get stuck," Meg said, "I'll borrow money from you, Gid. I promise that I will. Only first, I want to try to manage by myself."

That was a compact, but still his face was troubled.

"We could say we were engaged," he said. "If we told people that we were engaged, I could do anything for you that I wanted to."

A real proposal didn't sound like that; not from anything that Meg had heard about one at West Point. Gid's voice was so shy that she must be very careful not to let her voice sound like her mother's when she talked about the silver loving cup that the Faculty had given to her father. But what could Gid do for a girl except to give her flowers and books and gloves and a solitaire engagement ring? And those weren't what were needed.

"No man ever sends his fiancée through college, Gid," Meg said. "He never really wants to have her have an education."

"I wouldn't either," he replied. "Not at least if things were different."

If things were different. That meant if he didn't have to think about his mother, if he could forget her fragile, shell-like lovely face and her strange withdrawal from the actual world around her till memory was the place she liked to dwell in.

But if they both truly cared, wouldn't they forget about Gid's mother and brush all thought of her aside and run their chance? Surely Meg knew those who had plunged ahead and married regardless of a risk much worse.

"Nobody'd believe we were in love," she said. "We couldn't say we were engaged. People know that's not the way we feel about each other."

The words were barely out before Meg felt a quick clutch at her heart. Gid looked the way he'd look when he was old. His face was tight and drawn as he turned away and stared off at the slanting sunlight.

"I know one thing," he said. "If I don't marry, you won't either. You may think you want to up to the last minute. Then you'll duck."

He had spoken with a kind of satisfaction and excitement, but almost in a second she could feel his mood change and grow thoughtful.

"Your one chance," he began, "would be to run across some man who wouldn't even try to understand at all. You might run across a man who didn't give a damn for anything you've got except your looks. The others I can spoil for you."

"You wouldn't though. Even if you could, you wouldn't be so mean."

"I wouldn't want to, but I'd do it." He was speaking very carefully as though he meant to warn her. "Maybe it's not too late if you got away from Providence and found someone whom I'd never meet. And there's another thing we're going to try. Almost all our lives we've been dependent on each other. We know so much about each other that no one else seems very close. Knowing so much and meeting here like this, is what we've got to stop."

But who else was there she talked to honestly or trusted with a confidence?

"That doesn't mean," Gid was continuing, "that your promise about money when you need it, doesn't hold. It doesn't mean I won't do all I can about your father. And I'll make your mother understand that she's not being just to you about Byrn Mawr. But when I'm trying to play fair, you've got to keep your end up. When you're home, we're going to be polite and make a show of being friendly and that's all. Now for it."

They had left the Maxceys' little porch behind them and were walking past the briar roses and going down the damp slate walk, perhaps for the last time.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Meg was sitting in her Bryn Mawr room and staring at a letter that read like a royal summons. She was expected at the Deanery this afternoon at four o'clock. That was all the letter said and it was signed M. Carey Thomas.

No signature that Meg had seen, not those of statesmen or of Presidents, was more commanding and peremptory. It granted not one reason in the world why she should not turn up at the appointed hour.

Looking at the vigorous, black pen strokes, she thought of the portrait of President Thomas that hung on the east wall of Taylor Hall. People were right about the way that Sargent when he painted slyly brought out character. Hers, at first glance, he had made clear in the air of easy triumph on her handsome intellectual face and in the sumptuousness with which she wore her academic robes. Her love of mastery he had left out save for what he'd concentrated in one hand that grasped the carved arm of her chair. It clutched and held an oaken ornament as though it had to dominate the nearest thing within its reach. Through a letter it had signed, Meg could feel it dominating her.

She would have to answer that brief summons and no two ways about it. Already she was dressed in the best she had for the occasion and had on a hat when she never wore one on the campus and had taken out her only pair of clean white gloves.

But why had Miss Thomas sent for her? She wasn't in trouble with Self-Gov. She hadn't drunk or smoked or plagiarized or stayed out after the ten-thirty bell or done any of the things that turned a student into a culprit. And the only girls that Miss Thomas ever summoned were the few just on the brink of being fired.

What interest had she in the other students save in them collectively? She did like to talk to them in Chapel when they were the Student Body. During Dr. Barton's prayers, Miss Thomas got a little fidgety as though she thought it more important for them to hear about this world's affairs from her than about some unknown realm where the rivalry of sex might be left out.

But apart from her daily presence on the platform, she was a figure rarely seen about the campus and unapproachable to undergraduates. Occasionally she appeared clad in a long blue cape and limping slightly on a cane. At such times she seemed a very handsome, rather jolly-looking witch who found a kind of secret merriment in bamboozling her professors and hoodwinking everyone and managing the college with a strong, imperious will.

Certainly she didn't give a hoot about the girls as individuals and knew none of them. Who had a better reason than herself, Meg wondered, to believe that Miss Thomas didn't even know her name?

Could there be better proof than an adventure that Meg still laughed to think of? She could see the President coming up the boardwalk, being very genial and emphatic to some parents whom she had in tow. Meg had recognized their sort from long experience. They were rich potential donors to Bryn Mawr, but before they picked a college for their cherished child, they had to be assured of someone watching over her with a deep, personal concern.

While Meg had stepped aside until they passed, Miss Thomas had smiled at her warmly, even with a simulation of affection. "Good morning, Nancy," she had said quite firmly as though Meg's parents had given her that name, not Margaret. Old rascal that she was, Miss Thomas trusted to a student to play up to her game and not betray her, not even by a flicker of surprise. And how right she'd been. "Good morning, Miss Thomas," Meg could remember having answered quickly as though they were on friendly terms of some sort. Just for an instant, the President had let her share a joke and then sailed off, after giving the impression of knowing well each student at Bryn Mawr.

However, this occasion was quite different. Something that she herself had done, Meg knew, had come to the attention of the royal presence and was considered of enough importance for an interview. But what it was, she had not a vague idea; and she felt at a disadvantage as she reached the Deanery and rang the bell.

Never anywhere was there a longer hall than this cream-colored one that she was going down. Never were there more slippery Oriental rugs to stumble over. Never were there more etchings and engravings to pass by until she reached the end at which she had to turn into a room.

"Will you sit down, Miss Bailey," said a voice out of a dusky corner. "Suppose you take a seat right by the window."

That wasn't fair. It wasn't fair at all. Only faintly could Meg see Miss Thomas and know that she was dressed in a rich, ruby-colored fabric that had glistens woven through it. Her face

was in the shadow and Meg knew that her own was in full light.

She had heard that Miss Thomas never wasted words and she was not surprised to hear her speak abruptly,

"Why do you think, Miss Bailey, that I set the highest standards for my Bryn Mawr students?"

At least the answer to that question was quite simple.

"You don't want any favors shown to women," Meg was saying. "You'd like to have us beat men's colleges, Harvard and the good ones."

A hundred times she'd heard that from the platform. They must all keep on proving what Miss Thomas called their intellectual hardihood and pioneer against tradition and compete in every field there was.

"You don't want to have us take advantage of our sex," Meg added. "We're not to think we're weak and use weakness as a weapon to coax and wheedle anyone. We're to fight our way into Johns Hopkins and be doctors or we're to pass our Bar exams and be lawyers, or we're to get our Ph.D.'s from Heidelberg or Oxford."

"That's what I hope most fervently for all of you," she heard Miss Thomas say.

But Meg had never felt that any of those conspicuous careers had anything to do with her. If she could only come off with a plain B.A. degree, she would be lucky. Even that goal seemed a long way off and she often wondered if she'd have the wits or strength.

For a moment, Miss Thomas let the matter rest. Then her voice took on an edge.

"Miss Bailey," she was saying, "what's this I hear about your fainting in a classroom?"

Meg could feel a wave of shame come over her.

"I didn't do it purposely," she said. "I didn't faint before a man."

From the dim corner where she sat, Miss Thomas gave a warm, rich, very human laugh.

"No," she said. "I understand that you didn't swoon in any eighteenth-century fashion. But you have no business to be faint-

ing. There's nothing in your course to tax your strength to that extent. English, German and Philosophy. With a little application you should swing those subjects easily."

"I'm getting quite good marks," Meg pleaded. "I haven't let down on my work."

"So your professors tell me. But precisely *why*, Miss Bailey, are you so exhausted as to faint in any classroom? And precisely *what*, you will be good enough to tell me, are you doing every afternoon down in the Abernathys' barn?"

The Abernathys' barn! How did Miss Thomas know that that cold and dreary place existed? Why, it wasn't even on the campus. Gaunt and weather-beaten and deserted, it was down on the Gulf Road. It was right next to the old burial ground where the matted grass was never cut at any season and where no one thought of tending the old sunken graves.

"I thought," Meg said, "that Carola Woerishoffer was the only one who knew I went there."

"Did you?" said Miss Thomas with much satisfaction. "There are advantages, I find, in seeming to be ignorant of what goes on about this place. I daresay that your friend was the only person whom you asked inside to share in the conviviality. But other people take their constitutionals. Sometimes they seek variety and wander on the by-roads. Sometimes they gratify their curiosity. You have no idea, Miss Bailey, quite how much an extremely dirty window hung with cob-webs may reveal."

Meg was indignant from her deep humiliation.

"You followed me," she cried. "You followed me and you peeked in at me."

"Peeked," Miss Thomas said, "is not a word with any dignity. We shall prefer to say I looked. And what did I see, Miss Bailey? A scene that set me to rereading Dickens. I saw the inside of a haggard barn that was empty save for a few tombstones; a few old, mottled, broken tombstones. And four of those were being used like common paper weights to hold down the corners of an outspread piece of canvas. Lying prone upon the floor, Miss Bailey, was one of my own Bryn Mawr students. In a most unbecoming posture, a Bryn Mawr student was stretched out on the floor among a lot of dirty paint pots and was wielding scrubby

paint brushes. Moreover, I may add, that she was creating the most hideous monstrosities in black and scarlet. Miss Bailey, what are those monstrosities?"

"They're the embryo chick," Meg faltered. "I can't help it if they're horrible. They have to be exactly like the pictures that I copy and enlarge. They're the embryo chick's development in twenty days."

This time it was Miss Thomas who was surprised, but only for a moment.

"And what," she was demanding, "has this chick to do with English, German, and Philosophy, which are, I think, your subjects?"

"Nothing," Meg confessed. "Not anything, Miss Thomas. I'm doing lots of charts for the Biology Department. You see, they pay quite well for them, but they're much too big to do in my own room."

"May I inquire"—Miss Thomas was speaking with a new kind of severity—"if the Biology Department is aware of who is working for them and under what conditions?"

"No," Meg said. "Carola only told them that she knew a place where she could get charts done for them. She knew that I could paint and that I had to earn the money somehow. You see, she feels responsible. She's the one who wouldn't let me give up college."

"Give up college?" Miss Thomas meant to leave no corner for escape.

"Why should you think," she asked, "of doing that?"

Meg had to tell. She wasn't to be let out of it.

"Because my father's been retired from Brown for age," she said. "Because there's only just enough to get my brother through his Art School. My mother teaches. She does everything she can. But she can't educate us both."

Whatever Meg had said had changed the atmosphere. When Miss Thomas spoke again, there was a sort of fierce pride in her voice. "So you meant to work your way. You thought Bryn Mawr was worth the struggle. Suppose you move up nearer to me and tell me the whole tale."

Somehow she was making it quite easy by being so impersonal

even when she asked Meg questions. Meg was any girl who wanted dreadfully to be a Bryn Mawr graduate. And as she talked, she felt Miss Thomas scheming for her. Whatever else, Miss Thomas made it certain that she would find a way to see a student through.

"Only no more embryo chicks developing in frosty barns," she was insisting. "To get high marks and keep your health, you must have help financially. Is there no one who would give it to you?"

"Carola could," Meg said. "She would, too, although it's quite against her principles. She used to tell me having so much money hurt her friendships if she wasn't careful. Now she wants me to forget she ever thought so."

"Then why don't you let her help you?"

"Because," Meg said, "I'd find myself agreeing with her maybe when I didn't mean to."

"You're right," Miss Thomas stated quickly. "You're absolutely right in not accepting aid from friends. But there's the Students' Loan Fund . . ."

Clearly and simply she was telling all about it. It was meant for students just like Meg. There was no humiliation in applying to it; and a girl could sail through college easily with no personal favors sought or given. All that was expected of her was a proof of her responsibility borne out by her high marks.

But then . . . But then . . . Miss Thomas had reached the point where Meg was earning her own living and starting to pay back. Everything about the plan was fair and right and exactly as it should be.

"Only, Miss Thomas," Meg burst forth, "wouldn't I have to take the very first job that turned up?"

"I suppose that you would have to feel that obligation."

Didn't Miss Thomas see that that meant bondage and a kind of servitude?

"I don't believe," Meg said despairingly, "that I'm cut out for a teacher, and it would mean I had to teach. Besides, how much would you think I'd owe when I was through?"

"You have two years of college and a little more." Miss Thomas paused to estimate. "We might safely put the outside margin at three thousand dollars."

Three thousand dollars. That was the very sum Meg knew that

her father and her mother kept in the Rhode Island Savings Bank to guard against a grave emergency. Often she took the little bank book down for them and saw each small deposit entered and knew exactly what it meant in outside lecturing or articles or tutoring. Never for very long did it stay at the fixed sum. Something drained it with a rush and very slowly it came crawling back. Then for her to start her life with such a debt . . .

"I simply can't," she cried. "I suppose I thought about it day by day and piecemeal. But if Bryn Mawr is going to cost as much as that, I'll have to give it up."

"You can pay your loan off very gradually. You won't even feel it," said Miss Thomas. There was a trace of indignation in her voice.

"I don't mind skimping," Meg protested. "I can be dowdy and not care so very much. But I'm scared to death of debt and trying to meet bills and fearing that I can't in case of sickness. You don't know what it's like, Miss Thomas. But I can't remember when I didn't know. My mother couldn't help my knowing. She had more than she could manage till she started in to teach. And I don't believe I ever will get over being scared of owing people. Deep, deep down, I feel about it just the way I felt when I was small."

"So that even Bryn Mawr isn't worth that feeling?"

"No, nothing is. Not even being at Bryn Mawr."

Meg thought when she said that that she had put an end to any interest. But all of a sudden, Miss Thomas had pulled a lamp-chain and filled the oblong room with a warm glow. It was a glow that picked up warm, bright colors from the book shelves and glints and shimmers from the copper ornaments and that cast a full light on her crisp, gray hair and on her shrewd and handsome, ruddy face.

"Miss Bailey, we shall have a good stout tea," she announced surprisingly.

And a good, stout tea it proved to be, and not like the fragile British fare Meg got when she went down to Low Buildings. It was brought in on the most enormous silver tray and there were sandwiches, not toast, and a huge round layer cake, with a thick birthday frosting. Miss Thomas, when she came to eat it,

took two helpings unabashed and bade Meg do the same. And only when she'd set her plate aside, did she go on talking. What she had to say had not a thing to do with Meg at first.

"I have been rereading *Hamlet*," she began. "Not the soliloquies. When I have something that I wish to say to anyone, I prefer to put it in my own language. I have never cared to quote. Nor have I spent much time upon Horatio. Texts have been written on him, but I have never thought too highly of the value of his friendship. It lacked sturdiness. Miss Bailey, have you ever thought about the Leader of the Players?"

"No, Miss Thomas," Meg confessed. "I don't believe I thought he was important. I only know that Hamlet told him how to act."

"Then you have never thought about the value of a common person," Miss Thomas interrupted. "Shakespeare knew that value. He knew that it was sturdiness. I rate the common person very high. What I shall be on the lookout for is one who wants to enter college and who lacks the proper sort of preparation. At the present moment, I shall throw tutoring your way; enough to see you through this year. But I am thinking of the summer months when you could prepare a girl for college and chaperon her too. There would be a double recompense if you took her into your own house."

"But there isn't any room in my own house." The thought left Meg aghast. "I couldn't do that possibly . . . Only . . ."

"Only what?" Miss Thomas asked as Meg broke off.

"Only that everybody knows us in Rhode Island and if I was a chaperon they wouldn't think it one bit queerer than the things we're always doing. I could find a good place down the Narragansett Bay. I don't mean the kind of boardinghouse we have to go to. I mean a fairly good hotel. My cousins stay in one at Saunders-town."

"Will your cousins be quite sure to be there?"

"Yes," Meg said. "They have the same rooms summer after summer."

"Then," said Miss Thomas, beaming, "we shall turn our chaperonage to a feudal system. Your cousins shall be overlords and you shall have the real direct authority. It remains for me to find the fief."

Perhaps what Meg liked as much as anything was not being bound to any secrecy about the conversation. But as she left the Deanery and cut across the campus, she was thinking many thoughts.

Suppose tomorrow morning Miss Thomas should be escorting parents on the boardwalk. If Meg happened to pass by she felt sure that again she might be addressed as Nancy or by the first name that came to mind. But if she fainted in the classroom, she would have to give the reason why. And if day after day, she went down to the Abernathys' barn to paint charts for the Biology Department, Miss Thomas would go down the Gulf Road and follow her, even stoop to looking in the window at her. She'd send for her and tell her that she'd looked. And the moment that she heard that a girl was trying to get through Bryn Mawr, she'd set to work to help. Here was a backer who might use devious means, but who'd never let a student down.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The time had come for taking stock. Two whole years had passed since Meg had been summoned to the Deanery and then been helped to earn her way by tutoring. President Thomas had thought that to be a graduate of Bryn Mawr was worth that struggle. Then of all the bewildering things for her to say . . .

"The test of a good college," President Thomas had recently announced at Prayers, "is that a Senior Class should have outgrown it and be bored by it." What she had meant, Meg didn't understand; but she had the feeling that wisdom and considered judgment lay in what had been accepted as a most unpopular remark.

What? Outgrow Bryn Mawr? Be bored by it? The very thought of treachery like that had outraged Stella Haskins. It had drawn new furrows in her scowl and deepened the bracket round her mouth and made her declare that the Alumnae should be taking steps.

Meanwhile, going up and down the campus and in and out

of every hall, she was making plans about a first reunion. No matter where they were next year and no matter what they might be doing, they must all come back a hundred strong and prove their loyalty. These days, she kept doing things for the last time and then doing them again and humming songs in a low voice until she reached the words "Our Alma Mater." These words she sang very loud indeed to prove her fervency. Moreover, she was continually stopping all her classmates and writing down addresses in a small green leather book that she wore suspended from her belt. "The one important thing," she said to each of them, "is not to let ourselves get out of touch."

"She'll elect herself Class Scavenger. You'll see," Carola had confided. "She'll keep track of us and know who's first to die and she'll snuff out all the tragedies and failures. Don't let's leave any trails. Once we're off this campus, we're off of it for good. Miss Thomas was quite right. It's time that we were through with it. As for us and our keeping in close touch, the chances are we won't; and we'd be plain fools to think that there was much that we could do about it. Life's going to have the say."

Nobody else could be so blunt. All of Meg's other friends were exacting promises about long visits.

She was to go to Stockbridge and meet the Gilders and Mr. Ellery Sedgwick who had names so fabulous in their control of literature that they were spoken on the campus with a very special tone of voice. In summer, though, editors apparently lived much like other people and could forget the *Century Magazine* and even the *Atlantic Monthly* while they went on picnics and acted out the cleverest charades. Darling little Bunny, whose tongue got twisted over a long word, was to be the one who'd see that Meg met editors. "If you mean to write," she'd said with her cheeks bright pink and with her voice as solemn as her widow's peak of dark brown hair, "you must meet both the Gilders and Mr. Ellery Sedgwick most informally." Meg knew how informal she could be in presences so sacrosanct and how she would stumble over even proffering a plate of sandwiches and she meant to think up an excuse.

But there was Popey's comfortable parsonage at Newburyport and there was Peggy Ayer's place near Chicago.

Peggy had forgotten her desire to meet an Oxford Don and to lead a cloistered, bookish life and chattered on about her coming debut in Chicago. She had begun to talk of Mrs. Potter Palmer, who seemed to be the grandest person in the world. She lived in a great buttressed fortress on the Lake Shore Drive and dined on pure gold plate and had terraced snow-white hair fenced round with a tiara studded thick with diamonds. At any rate, she ruled the social world and before Peggy made her bow to it, she would have time for her college friends, to come to visit her. "Magsy, do come," Meg would hear her wheedling. "All you need to do is to go on to New York and step on board the 'Flyer.'" She never thought of the expense.

Peggy had stopped calling her two married sisters by their nicknames. Now she referred to them as young society matrons who were always entertaining and who would see that Meg met men. Especially she was to meet the Dixons, who were all "Skull and Bones" at Yale. All except one who had been sent back to college for two whole extra years and still had not been "tapped." Somehow he was the one whom Meg thought that she might like to meet, but he had stopped dining out because he was embarrassing to everyone. It was the others who would show her round and give her a good time. She knew that she never would go out West and meet them, but it was fun to think she might.

Carola alone had not once talked about a visit. Sometimes Meg wished she would, and at other times she admired Carola's honesty. The one time that she had spent a Sunday with Carola in New York hadn't been a great success. From the moment Meg had seen the portal to that palace, great heavy surfaces of thick glass adorned with a forest foliage of bronze and with a huge bronze knocker that had reminded her of Scrooge, she had been scared. And going up the flight of marble stairs, she had felt as though she had been lured into the Metropolitan Museum to spend a night among the armor. The trappings of fierce knights-at-arms had seemed to point long spears or double up their gauntlets at her from dark cavernous corners and she had been glad to reach a bedroom that had been like the shirred rose satin boudoir of a Mme. Pompadour or Marie Antoinette.

What Carola had most minded had been the awe inspired by

her mother, Mrs. Woerishoffer, who had had the bleak, proud face of widowed royalty and a figure shaped just like a tent; a regal tent panoplied in crepe and slowly moved from room to room by servitors in uniform. The more Meg had shown her awe, the less Carola'd liked her, and they had come near to having rows.

"Why on earth," Carola had said, "you felt you had to say you liked those dreadful German paintings that Mother bought in Munich. Boecklin with his satyrs catching great fat nymphs in dusky groves, and not quite twitching off their only garment. You know they're lewd. Since you've got some taste, why don't you fight for it?" Meg could remember sitting mute and miserable under the attack; especially when she'd been told that there was a side of her that had "a lackey's soul."

Carola could be as rough with her as that. And yet she was the only one who knew about the embryo chick and all the summer tutoring and the other little ways by which a girl put herself through college.

And she was the only one whom Meg had told when word at last had come from Dr. Holden. "Salutes to a young Trojan," he had written. "I want you to hear of it even before I write your father. But he's surely going to have his pension from the Carnegie Foundation. Perhaps you'd like to know I drew on your account of him to help me tip the scales."

All her life, Meg would remember that day well and how she'd bolted to Carola's room and gone to pieces there. Who so hated scenes? Who had less patience with them? And yet Carola must have got her to a couch and locked the door and cut all her lectures; for whenever Meg had stopped her sobbing and looked up, hadn't she seen her friend sitting at her big brown mission desk, keeping her back squarely turned so that there needn't be the shame of being watched? Carola hadn't found a word to say, but though she had made believe that she was working, from time to time hadn't there been the sound of her hands rubbing palmwise; a thing she only did when she was pleased?

Somehow, too, it was Carola, Meg knew well, who had got her off the campus without anybody's seeing her; and they'd walked miles and miles in silence until she'd realized that they were sitting on a bank that shelved down to a muddy shallow stream,

mottled by thin shade. It had been like waking from a daze. Very gradually Meg had noticed that the dogwood everywhere about them was in bloom and that one drooping bough above their heads had snow-white flowers whose petals were each stiffly curved and stained by a single blood-red fleck. There'd been wild azalea, too, with warm, spring sunlight shining through its honeysuckle trumpets. It had been so near that without sensing it at first, Meg had watched a bumblebee crawl up and down its stamens till the pollen clogged its legs. Then slowly her gaze had travelled farther off; and one by one, she had recognized the different trees and thought of how she'd come to know the nature of their growth. It had come from her father's taking her on walks. She could hear him pointing out the smooth, gray velvet bole of a great beech, the tough sinews showing through the bark of ironwood, the gnarled rind of an oak through which the buds came breaking with an almost baby softness. Desperately, she had wanted to be home to see him with his pride restored; and recalling what he'd taught her about trees was the only way she had of feeling close.

She had tried to talk about it to Carola and had had to give it up.

"I don't believe my father ever saw a blade of grass," Carola had said. "If he had, he would have ordered somebody to pull it up. I can't help you with that kind of talk."

Instead she had thought up a game that they had played with a kind of devastating frankness. Not at first, because it had been hard for Meg to turn her thoughts away from what she'd known was happening in her home on Cushing Street.

But when Carola called a name, she'd said Meg was to answer with the first thing that it brought to mind, no matter if it sounded silly. She had started with, "Professor Irons." Meg knew that her response had been the one word "Anaxagoras." Not Descartes or Kant with his "categorical imperative" on whom they had spent months. Only the name "Anaxagoras" had emerged from the world of speculative thought.

About Professor Leuba in Psychology, they had some discussion. When Carola'd said his name, Meg had replied with "Leonardo's fresco. The sad, faded face of Christ in 'The Last

Supper.' A man with the sad, faded face of Christ, knocking superstition into a cocked hat." But they had both talked about the way he'd forced them to face truth in so far as they could recognize it, and the snares and pitfalls that he'd set for them, and the lack of mercy that he'd shown in letting them fall in until they had admitted they were trapped. Then only had he shown the one way out. In the end, he had done something to make them take stock of themselves a little differently and to be pitiless about their acts and not run out on them with feminine excuses. That he had accomplished, though he himself had never seemed to have the flicker of a hope.

There had been members of the faculty whom they had passed over quickly. Dr. Scott with her great, grizzled bison's head and scarlet hood had stood to them for space and curves so limitless that they hadn't dared to venture in her courses, but they'd had a real respect for those who did. And Carola had seen Dr. Bascom only as a mannish figure in a scant tweed skirt that let her whip around the countryside with more agility while she chipped off bits of rock with a small mallet. When Meg thought back to her Freshman year, she still saw a very honest, kindly, disappointed face; the face of one who had watched her turn from crystals and a microscope to an unreal world of letters that for a scientist had no pattern and no governing laws.

There had been Professor Andrews, valiant and martial in appearance, a fit companion for Pepin of Hérystal and Charlemagne and other mediaeval figures into whom he had put life. And there had been Professor Muzzey, who had been most concerned about the Babylonian Captivity which seemed of all dead issues, the most dead.

Their own special subjects, English and Economics, they'd left out because neither of them could check up on the other.

But German they had shared. Carola, speaking every dialect there was, had taken it as a snap subject that left her more free time for labor problems; and Meg had majored and post-majored in it. Exactly why she didn't know.

"Little Collitz," Meg had responded when Carola had given her his name. "Schiller. Lovely lyric lines from Schiller and from Heine. But above all Goethe. Microscopic notes to Goethe. Twenty

pages of the Second Part of *Faust* taking up a whole semester. Positive Good and Positive Evil explained by a gentle little scholar who's never met with either of them."

Carola had agreed.

"But what about the other part of German? What about Professor Jessen?" she'd tossed at Meg.

"Shouting. Lots of shouting." His wild and high-pitched voice was what she'd thought of first. But in her mind she'd seen him standing up behind the rostrum and motioning to a damp, white forehead and a cavernous chest at the same time while he'd screamed of things that came "von unten und von oben." It had been hard to take down notes.

Besides, it had been needless to take notes. There'd been Jessen's worship of a man called Nietzsche who wrote the hardest German that she'd ever tackled and who had only one idea. The future world would not concern itself with Good and Evil. It would have advanced far, far beyond them. And it would be ruled over by a blond Germanic beast that Meg saw as more repulsive for its blondness; a great, pale, naked, terrifying creature without the vestige of a pelt to shield its nakedness. It was going to rend and tear and snarl at weakness; to snarl at weakness, torture it, and then devour it.

"Jessen's raving, tearing mad," she'd said. "He thinks that you and I are going to live to see the crazy horrors that he dreams of."

"Maybe we will," Carola had remarked, to Meg's surprise. "If the Prussians have their way, we will. Jessen's not the only one who dreams about 'Der Blonde Beste.'"

"The Prussians." Meg had been contemptuous. "They wear spiked helmets and they strut about Berlin and push people off of sidewalks. That's all they ever do."

But Carola had insisted that it wasn't and that they were working at some sort of plan. She was glad, she'd added, that since her sister had thought she had to have a title, she'd snatched it out of Austria, not Germany. "After all, she is part Jewish," Carola had said thoughtfully. "Not that I waste much worry over her. She knew what she was doing when she left America, but I do get scared about the boys."

It had been queer to hear Carola speak about her Jewish

ancestry as though it mattered, and queerer still to hear her say that she was scared by anything or over anybody. Meg knew Carola had been ashamed of her confession, because she'd risen from the ground abruptly. "It's time that we went home," she'd said, and they had started on the soft earth road that led back to Bryn Mawr.

And all along the sunny way that ran past open country whose folds were like the folds of a soft blanket and whose broad low farmhouses were made from yellowy stone, Carola had made fun of Meg maliciously. She was always going to think of her, when as President of the English Club, she had to introduce Miss Agnes Repplier.

"Don't," Meg had begged. "Please don't."

Even now it made her feel ashamed to think of how she must have looked in one of Cousin Belle's grand evening gowns that Mother had made over for her. It had been an orchid-colored satin with a stiff gored skirt and with heavy pearl passementerie round the low square neck, and Meg had felt that she was masquerading as the patroness of a big Trocadero Ball in Providence.

"You don't suppose," she'd told Carola, "that I didn't feel a fool."

"I hoped you did," Carola had said, and then she'd started in to mimic her. "'It gives me the greatest pleasure to present Miss Agnes Repplier, who will speak to you on 'Cats.' ' I don't know which I minded worse, that or the time when I had to listen to Van Dyke, who spoke on 'Love.' "

Anyhow, Meg had one memory of Henry James that was safe from all Carola's raillery. She didn't even know about it. Meg had kept thinking of it while she was being teased. She was thinking of it now while she sat in her own window seat as the twilight filled her room.

Except for a pale light that had marked the diamond panes of a deep casement, there had been shadows, thin and traceable, where a group of girls had sat and talked and argued, but merging into a deep dusk that had seemed to bring them closer to each other and to make possible the kind of talk they never had by day.

"I don't believe you've ever seen Rhodora," Meg had said. Then she had tried to tell about the quiet jet-black pool at Petersham and the brilliant petals drifting on its surface and the single

flaming bush whose brilliance might have gone unseen unless all alone she'd happened on it.

"I know how Emerson felt," she'd said. "Not all he felt, but something of it."

Someone had jeered at her. Someone had asked her if she'd spoken to Rhodora and had actually said "Dear" to it. Keats had never gone as far as saying anything so silly to a plant. Even Wordsworth hadn't.

"I don't care," Meg had protested angrily and she'd quoted lines from *The Red Slayer* and the *Hippocritic Days*. "I don't care what anybody says, Emerson was a great poet."

"That protest, if I may say so, is like a rye field rippling when there is no wind."

Out of the gloom, a man's shy, aristocratic voice had spoken and had made the loveliest picture for her; and she had glanced up to be aware of a huge white dome-shaped forehead and a distant face as blurred in features as the moon's and at the moment quite as bodiless. She hadn't seen "the Master" plain, but he had spoken to her. He'd spoken when he hadn't meant to say a word, when he'd begged his niece to keep him in obscurity, and to let him listen to them prattle on as though they were alone.

It had been a different Henry James, a very pompous Henry James togged out in evening clothes, who had mounted to the platform the next night and who had addressed his audience on "The Question of Our Speech." There were phrases from that lecture that Meg kept in memory. "Rainy days in residential streets," was one. That had recalled *The Newcomes* and so much of Thackeray. But the man who'd coined that phrase so carefully had been self-conscious and aware of his adoring audience; of Miss Thomas robed in dark green velvet woven with silver lilies, of every awed and upturned face of Faculty and students. "The rye field rippling when there was no wind," was Meg's. It was a possession that belonged to her alone.

It was a possession that Carola wouldn't understand at all. But that, after all, was not the sort of thing that had mattered in a friendship. Who else among Meg's friends dealt with her in the same blunt way as though she was capable of standing truth unsoftened? Who else could she have sought that day when word

had come from Dr. Holden; when he had sent her the amazing news that her father was to have a pension from the Carnegie Foundation?

Not once had Carola made a reference to it. But after their long walk, Meg could recall how they had parted at the door of Merion Hall. Carola's clear, green agate eyes had put her on inspection before she'd gone to meet the girls inside. And Carola's voice had been quite casual.

"Well," she'd said, "we can't be very boastful over what we've got from college, though maybe if we'd never come at all . . ."

If they had never come at all. This was almost Meg's last night and for hours she'd sat here thinking. President Thomas was quite right. A girl should outgrow Bryn Mawr. If she was honest, Meg was glad that she was through with it. All the same, there were people whom she wanted to remember. Mostly people. Besides them, a way of tackling work. And perhaps a few ideas.

CHAPTER XXXV

This was the last time that Meg would sit in Taylor Hall; at least as an undergraduate. After four whole years, this was her very own Commencement; and once the Baccalaureate was over with she would be getting her degree.

Her immediate worry was not to fidget in her slippery yellow chair. All around her, her classmates were behaving much in the same manner. Though their starched white dresses wouldn't show so very much beneath their long, black academic gowns, it was important to file up and reach the stage without a stumble. And worse yet, when they were handed their diplomas, how were they ever going to bow and keep their stiff mortarboards in place? "I might as well try to wear a dictionary," Meg could hear Carola saying as she'd driven in an extra hatpin. Even she, who never thought about her looks, was nervous. But though her name would be read out as leading the whole class in marks, she would only have to march across the platform once and then as one of the whole throng. Meg sat thinking of how she'd have to do it

twice and the second time she'd have to steel herself to being all alone.

Somewhere on the speaker's lectern was the English Essay Prize that she had worked so hard for. Would Miss Thomas hand it to her done up in a box or would Meg have to stand and stoop and let the long gold chain be slipped around the corners of her cap until it hung down from her neck? Then would it be polite to pause and stare at the gold watch in gratitude or could she tuck it in her belt and make a bolt?

One thing Meg knew for certain. Miss Thomas often said the oddest things in giving this reward. Last year, for instance, hadn't she made the winner of it miserable? "Originally this was a prize bestowed for looks," Miss Thomas had explained emphatically to the whole assemblage. "The donor of it was an old, old gentleman. I was aware that very soon the prize could be converted to an academic honor. I am glad to say the prize has been so converted." She herself had looked confused at the laughter that had greeted her remarks, but then she'd seemed to feel assured that she'd said something witty. The girl, however, who had had a clever, intellectual face, had turned purple in her agony before she could get off the stage.

What would Miss Thomas say today? She was capable of coming forth with personalities. Meg could be sure of that.

But at least she had the comfortable assurance that no one else would have to be ashamed for her. It was not as though her mother and her father could have afforded to come on from Providence. Safe in her room in Merion Hall was the necklace that had once belonged to her Virginian grandmother. She liked to think about its graded amethysts, each cut into an octagon and clamped deep in a setting of old gold. That was what her father had saved up to give her on the right occasion. And in her wardrobe was the lavender silk muslin dress that her mother had made to go with it. Meg could see her mother adding an extra row of lace insertion to make up for the fact that she couldn't come to Garden Party or see her daughter in the act of getting the Bryn Mawr degree on which she'd set her heart, how many years ago?

Strangely enough it was Carola who minded that no one could spend the money on a trip from Providence. Always she had

spoken of her mother as her chief antagonist; the only one whom she thought worthy of her steel. But for once, the presence of that domineering dowager was a presence that she valued. "I don't want to march up feeling like a little bastard." That was what Carola had said before she knew how much her words might hurt someone who had to take the absence of a family for granted. Then she had done a thing that was so little like her, and had made a present of a gold link bracelet when jewelry was what she most despised and when she made a practice of not giving gifts to anyone. "You can dump it in the scrap-basket," she'd remarked as she had left Meg with a little cardboard box.

It too was in her bureau drawer, next to a present that had come from Gid and that marked the only break in his long silence. "You'll be sure to say that girls don't take jewels, not unless they're bad," he'd written on a card. "But there isn't any way for you to send it back. Besides, one baroque pearl isn't much of a first step." Wasn't it, when it hung from the thinnest platinum chain?

Well, the speaker, whoever he might be, had finished his long talk about "Life's Threshold" and had reached his "Ave atque Vale" which inevitably seemed to be the last and ceremonious salute.

"Baccalaureae et sociae," rang the clear voice of Miss Thomas. When she spoke Latin, she spoke it with such pomp that it became the tongue of trumpets and of clarions. She might be Queen Elizabeth of England rising from her throne and addressing foreign legates and not a group of frightened girls.

At once there was a squeaking from all the many camp chairs and Meg had risen with her classmates and was filing towards the stage that gave off the bitter smell of wilting daisies that were cut and clumped into festoons and garlands. Just ahead of her was Peggy Ayer.

"An obstacle race is what I've really run," was what Peggy liked to say of her four years at college. But she minded leaving her mellow book-lined room in Pembroke East. She kept protesting that she'd never liked game-hunting, by which she meant the act of coming-out and being popular with men.

Quaky as she might feel, no one knew better how to make a good appearance. By copying her, Meg knew exactly how to stand

and make her brief bow to Miss Thomas and how to take her parchment roll and turn without holding up the whole procession. The only difference was that there was not a soul for her to smile at in the audience as she came down the six steps and started for her seat.

As her class kept filing past, Meg thought of Stella Haskins, who so wanted everyone to keep in touch. Why did she? Weren't they going to meet more people, even more exciting people? Meg could pick out girls with whom she had formed no bond of any sort in the four long years that she had spent here. What happened to them after college wouldn't interest her a bit, any more than they'd be interested in what occurred to her.

Carola was entirely different. At last she had come at the end of the long queue and her gown had slipped down on one shoulder and her extra hatpin hadn't kept her cap in place. But anyone would have to guess that it wouldn't be an ordinary life that lay ahead of her. Impossible to think of her as marrying. What man would listen to her talk on labor problems? Besides, she was on the side of labor, and that any man would hate. Then if not marriage, what? Living in a settlement house? Would that content her? And was she truly going to be so keen about those dreary immigrants that kept coming on the steerage and being dumped off on a place called Ellis Island? What, too, about those scary awful places called Raines Law hotels where bad women stayed on purpose for what happened there? What did she think that she could do about them by herself?

Meg was still thinking when she heard Miss Thomas reading out the list of those who had won high honors in Science and Philosophy, in Mathematics, History and Science. At the last of them she heard her name called out.

This person whom she was confronting was not the person who had once given her a good stout tea; not even the one who had helped her earn her way by summer tutoring. This Miss Thomas was a power, an intellectual power who made her approbation matter.

But she didn't seem to care a whit about the English Essay Prize that Meg had worked so hard for. With the very briefest mention of her winning it, Miss Thomas had handed out a watch

still done up in its black morocco box. Didn't she know, couldn't she guess that it was all there was to matter in these Graduation Exercises? Then why not one word of praise? And why, with a firm handclasp, did she make it so impossible to get away?

At last the clapping had died down, but the grip still held, although Miss Thomas had turned now to the audience.

"Miss Bailey," she was saying, "is about to meet with a great honor. It came as a surprise to me, the President of Bryn Mawr. It will come as more of a surprise to her."

Then there was a look of mischief in her eyes, but of kindness and well-wishing too.

"To Margaret Emerson Bailey, a Graduate Scholarship in English conferred by the University of Chicago. . . ."

Under the applause, her voice was meant, Meg knew, for her alone.

"It is an ample scholarship," Miss Thomas said. "It is one that needs no supplementing."

In the split instant before she left the stage, Meg knew what Miss Thomas was remembering; her first visit to the Deanery; a glimpse of her through a dirty window hung with cobwebs, her whole dealings with the embryo chick enlarged in black and scarlet. That interview and everything concerning it, had caught a most capricious fancy. Miss Thomas meant it when she turned again to the big crowded hall and said,

"It is not in the usual spirit of congratulation that I wish Miss Bailey all good luck."

✧ PART FOUR ✧

CHICAGO UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER XXXVI

To Grandmother, it made no difference whether Meg was going clear out to the Coast or to Chicago University. What was the West but one great region fraught with dangers? It still meant California and the Gold Rush and the sand-hills where Great-uncle James had been eaten up by wolves. Besides, there were the dangers all along the way. No good, Grandmother said, had ever come of heading off in that direction.

When she felt well and vigorous, she called Meg just another Simmons, who was traipsing off to get mixed up with foreigners and who was the most senseless of them all because she was a female. Females could find safer ways of being flighty within sight of their own chimney-tops and would do well to bide at home.

These days, though, there were times when Grandmother forgot to worry; times when her mind would cloud up suddenly. Then in a jiffy, she would pack her little reticule and want to start for Simmonsville. "This is only where I lodge," she'd say disdainfully as she glanced around the room where she had lived for years.

This, Meg knew, was a comment that hurt her mother terribly. For as long as it was possible, it was easier for someone not so close and so responsible to be the one on guard.

And when Grandmother was awake and restless, Meg truly didn't mind her wanderings. She often felt that she was sharing in the gentlest sort of games; games that brought all sorts of pleasant things to mind. A little while ago, they had gone slowly down the hall to look for pear trees in full bloom, a bloom so full that they would see it in the distance as a sheet of white. Then suddenly instead they had been searching for a grove where the hazel nuts fell thick and gleamed among a drift of leaves in back of the old Simmons Homestead. And finally when they had

reached the farthest window and had sat awhile and rested on the sofa, they had been waiting for the mills to close and for Grandpa to drive by in his new carriage and to take them home to tea. "But you're to come along with me," Grandmother had insisted. "We're more than sisters. We're good friends."

Well, so in a funny way they were and had been ever since the days when Grandmother had told Meg stories that went with the pictures in the old family album. Even now the closeness held. "Let's us two steal away where there aren't any books to make a clutter." That had been spoken in a whisper. Then as though they had planned a dark conspiracy, they had crept back stealthily to Grandmother's own room and without a protest she had gone to bed.

Once there, however, the clouds had almost cleared away and a thin old voice had begged, "You're not to let me pester anyone." Today it had gone on and added, "You're to fetch old Dr. Bogert. Tell him he's to come and tend to me." Meg had nodded, but she couldn't fetch old Dr. Bogert. He was dead.

Even when he'd been alive, he'd been a legendary figure; and now that he was gone, people liked to talk about him as though he'd been a figure of heroic size. Who else had learned his surgery right at the Battle of Bull Run, amputating legs and arms with any sort of instrument? Who else had built up his practice with no help from anyone? Or had gone his way so regardless of opinion, a law unto himself in his blunt high-handed dealings with the rich and poor, favoring grit above high fees and turning his attendance to a compliment? Besides, before his death, had he told a soul that he was near the end? No indeed. He'd operated right up to the last and had left the hospital without a word, speeding home with his buggy slewing round the street corners. But most of all, people liked to think of how he had gone off to die at Little Compton with the ocean in full sight and a high wind whistling round the house that had a cellar blown from solid rock.

Sitting here in Grandmother's silent room, it was easy to recall the dark red, arklike house set high up on the highest ledge and cutting the wide sky with ugly angles. And it was easy to recall a wide, unsheltered porch open to the steady gale and overlook-

ing the Atlantic. Clearest of all, Meg could see a woman with her back turned to the sea, hating it and spurning it while she waited for a husband who "was more than likely not to come."

What about her? What had become of her? She had died some years ago, so people said. But at the end, had she had to die with the ocean "racketing around her, making senseless noises"? No one seemed to know or care.

They just kept on telling stories of old Dr. Bogert and the big funeral that had filled Grace Church with Goddards, Browns, and Gammels, but with mill-hands, too, and race-track touts and jockeys, even with women they called "dubious-looking" who wouldn't dare intrude except in this one case.

And down the center aisle had walked "young" Dr. Bogert all alone with his face as set and hard as granite. That was the sort of man he was, they said. The only feeling he'd been known to have for anyone, he wouldn't show. His only sign of grief was that he couldn't bear the mention of his father's name.

Which wasn't true at all. If it was, he'd refuse to treat Grandmother Simmons. And instead of doing that, every single day at twelve o'clock, he drove up in his brand new automobile that only went to prove, so everybody said, how soon he meant to race right through the fortune that he had inherited. By Grandmother's dome-shaped mahogany clock that had an extra dial for the tides, it was almost time for him to stop in now.

And the very moment that he walked into this room and woke her up, she'd begin to talk about his father, though it could never be as bad again as it had been the first day.

To Meg, this Dr. Bogert never seemed quite real. He seemed like an illustration for the most correct, expensive mourning. Even his moustache might have been dipped in dye to match his dense black suit and the very fine black striping in his shirt and the small black square initials in his neat white handkerchief. She was so awed that she carried out his orders silently. But Grandmother hadn't shown the least respect for grief.

"I don't like whippersnappers," she'd announced when he'd first come. "I'd rather deal with Homeopaths."

For an instant his steel gray eyes had had a glint of entertainment at her scorn of him. But no matter how she'd tried to turn

and twist away from him, he had found her little wrist and kept a firm, thick finger on her pulse. Then he had known exactly how to manage her and had told her how in glancing through old ledgers, he'd discovered that she was the first real paying patient that his father'd had.

Nothing could have pleased her more. It had been enough to start her off about the bowl of scalding water that she'd held for the old Doctor while he'd probed to find the bullet brought home by a Simmons from Manassas. Nowadays when she began that tale, this Dr. Bogert waited till she'd almost reached the end. Then he broke right in. "I know," he'd say. "I used to hear of how you never flinched." At that remark, she brightened up.

Anyhow he liked her stories of his father. He listened to them for a long, long time while Meg kept very quiet in the slippery horsehair rocker by the window, tidying a sewing basket, taking out the little piece of bee's wax that was scored by all the threads that had been drawn across it or working hidden needles out of a small green flannel pincushion. And Dr. Bogert didn't act at all like the man who'd driven her in a high dog-cart with lemon yellow wheels or who had wanted her to do a special dive for him. He gave her a thermometer to wash and sometimes a prescription that was signed with three initials run together. That was all.

Out boomed the twelve strokes for the noon hour from the belfry of the Baptist Meeting House. They had drowned out the sound of steps as he'd come up the stairs. But after nodding to Meg formally, he was sitting by the rosewood bed and waking Grandmother by picking up the small right hand that had hemmed and overcast and buttonholed more garments than Meg liked to think of. It had even helped with the lavender percale that she had on right now.

Grandmother had no such quiet thoughts. Her dim, gray eyes looked startled and she must have come out of a nightmare that terrified her still.

"Bisons," she was saying. "Bisons in great herds stampeding over prairies."

"They're dying out," said Dr. Bogert. "But in their day my father shot a beauty out in Omaha."

That must have been the one whose enormous, shaggy pate

Meg had seen set high above the mantelpiece at Little Compton. Even with the worn, white patch above one eye, how indignantly and scornfully it had looked down on her.

"My father used to tell me how he brought the fellow to his knees with just one shot," said Dr. Bogert. "My father used the skin to make a winter lap-robe for his buggy. It lasted him his lifetime."

"That's bison's dead," Grandmother said, "and I don't have to fret about it. It won't ever make for Meg."

"Make for Meg?" he asked.

"Yes, Meg, my granddaughter." By now Grandmother was sitting bolt upright and pleading with him. "You're not to let her traipse out West," she begged. Then out began to pour not only all her fears of buffaloes, but of Choctaws and of Mormon Elders searching for young, likely wives and dragging them away to dwell in heathen Zion temples. If she only wouldn't make her terrors quite so personal. But they were funny in a way. At least they would be if they concerned somebody else.

"I wouldn't worry, Mrs. Simmons," Meg listened to the doctor saying soothingly. Apparently he thought that he was dealing with the wildest fancies. "Your granddaughter is sitting right here in this room. She isn't in the slightest danger."

"Yes, she is." Grandmother's small, round head was bobbing. "What's she doing going to Chicago with nobody to fend for her? Where's Gid that he don't put his foot down?"

"Gid?" asked Dr. Bogert.

"Yes, Gid Codman. He wouldn't let her go. He wouldn't want to have Meg meeting with rough men who wive inside stockades."

It kept getting worse and worse till Dr. Bogert said, "Suppose I go downstairs and talk this over with your granddaughter? Wouldn't that content you?"

But first, he was giving Grandmother some sort of sedative that he had mixed himself in the little wineglass on her bed-table. Only if she swallowed it right down, would he consent, he said, to take a hand in this whole matter. And when she had obeyed, he waited till she put her head back on the bolster and lay there with her panic stilled and with her puckered face relaxed.

Then he and Meg were in the parlor that he didn't seem to fit at all. It wasn't used to men who looked like illustrations for the most expensive tailoring. It didn't even have the proper sort of chairs to offer them. The only comfortable armchair in the whole room was made of black rattan and that Dr. Bogert had taken. But a strand of wicker at the back had come uncurled and would be sure to snag his suit unless she told him. And she couldn't tell him while his stare was taking in the mantelpiece.

Suppose it did have fluted panels and the finest beadwork? Suppose it had been lovely in the Simmons Homestead? He could see, Meg knew, that her mother had transported it and nailed it up against the wall and just pretended that there was an open fireplace under it. And what about the china that her mother had ranged along the shelf? She might have a knack with color, but that didn't put a spout back on the deep blue teapot or take the crack out of the silver lustre pitcher. Every flaw stood out; and right against her shoulder, as she sat in the stiff Hepplewhite, Meg could feel the jagged place where the curving of the shield stopped short because it had been broken years ago.

And like the room, she wasn't right to be sitting with a man who was dressed as flawlessly as Kyrle Bellew or any actor. He was used to older women; to the kind that Cousin Belle referred to as being "groomed and perfect in each small appointment." There wasn't one appointment to Meg's lavender percale. She was being "only clean" the way she'd always had to be; and she could feel her cotton stockings wrinkling round the ankles and her thick hair bushing out beneath her net and her cheeks burning red.

Most casually Dr. Bogert had taken out a bright scarlet box of Milo cigarettes and struck a match. Before he spoke a thin gray twist of smoke went drifting off.

"So," he began. "So Gid Codman would be sure to put his foot down."

He made it sound as though Gid's foot, no matter what it did, wouldn't matter in the least to anyone. Well, Meg knew what Gid thought of him and how Gid had stolen off to have appendicitis out of town because, he claimed, he didn't want to have a stone wall for a doctor.

"Gid's my best friend," Meg said. "He isn't here. He's in the

Valley starting in his father's mills. But if he were here to know, he'd be awfully glad that I'd won a Scholarship in English. He'd want to have me go out to Chicago if I wanted to."

"So that's the sort he is," said Dr. Bogert. "He won't get very far by handling any girl like that. But what's all this about your going to Chicago?"

Meg started to explain. "I'm going out to study at the University. And Grandma Simmons won't believe there is a university. She thinks it's all a wilderness. She keeps going back to her own day when only men went West adventuring."

"Only men." He seemed amused. "Would you say that you were starting off adventuring?"

"In a way I am," Meg said. "My father thinks I ought to start off in that spirit. He thinks that if I do I ought to find the whole experience exciting. He says it won't be very different from his searching the Sierras for new plants and lichens. Only I'll be searching for new people and I ought to run across all sorts of new and fresh ideas."

"Fresh ideas?" Dr. Bogert made the thought of them sound silly. "I should think you would have had about enough of them at college."

"No," Meg said. "I want some new ones. I'm really awfully tired of hearing about Woman's Suffrage; that and Sex Equality."

"Then you don't take much stock in them?" His question came out with a puff of smoke.

"I do take stock in them," Meg stated firmly. "I believe in them, of course. But I've heard about them for so long that I think about them as dead issues."

"Dead issues? I didn't know that they'd been live ones."

The idea, of being quite as ignorant as that! Before Meg knew it, she was telling him about a lecture by the little Pankhursts who had come on the stage in Taylor Hall in military capes and in hats with prows shaped like the prows of battleships. And Dr. Bogert wasn't like the boys of Meg's own age. From his expression, she could tell that he was interested.

"The Suffrage Movement's being so well organized," she said, "that I don't have to think about it any longer. It's the Single Standard that I really want to fight for."

"What would you say the Single Standard was?" he asked.

When he was so much older it seemed odd that he shouldn't know. But it was easy to explain that what held true for men should hold as true for women.

"It's only right that women should conduct their lives in precisely the same way as men, with the same sort of freedom. And before long that's the way it's going to be," Meg said.

"When it is," he said, "I hope that I'll be there to see it."

Just for an instant, she felt that he was looking at her differently. Then he was stamping out a cigarette in an ash tray on the center table. As he got up from his chair, and she rose too, he went on talking.

"Well, I must be getting home to lunch and the single standard of a bachelor. Your grandmother," he said, "is going to miss you badly. I'll do my best about the bisons, but it's going to be tough work to calm her down. I've got some fears for you myself, but they're not of bisons or of Mormon Elders."

Meg's hand was in his hard, dry clasp. And somehow she was being more aware of him than she had ever been of any man. Always she was going to know the feeling of his black serge coat as it brushed across the bareness of her arm. And always she would know the way his chin came out in a strong jut, as though his will was bent on getting something that he wanted. It made his lower lip show just too much beneath his close moustache and it dared something in her to resist, and told her that there'd be a struggle that would be exciting. His fine straight nose and his forehead were exactly like his father's, but his steel gray eyes were different. They were looking at her hard and making her uncomfortable. However, his deep voice was sounding kind.

"Listen," he was saying. "You're to promise me one thing. When you get out to Chicago, hold back on the Single Standard, will you?"

"You mean it wasn't right for me to talk about it?"

She could feel that she was blushing and that he seemed to be standing very close to her.

"It was all right for you to talk to me," he said. "But out there in the West, you might run foul of some man who wouldn't understand you. Keep your convictions about women's freedom to your-

self for yet awhile. If you don't, you'll meet with dangers worse than bisons."

In a moment he had wished her luck and gone.

CHAPTER XXXVII

When Meg thought about Professor Manly as she'd known him years ago, she thought about a man with a close coppery beard that had pointed his whole face, whichever way it turned, and had made it look like one of Rembrandt's eager and inquisitive doctors in "*The Lesson on Anatomy*." But the little man who had met her at the station in Chicago was clean-shaven and had a rosy, round, and undistinguished face until she'd caught his eye.

Now every time she met his glance his clear blue eyes communicated. They understood that she was scared by new surroundings. Better than that, they understood that, however scared she was, she would have liked to come alone on this adventure and not be sheltered by her mother's wing. Without a single spoken word, a look gave her the promise of a life that would be free from oversight or interference the moment that her mother'd left for home.

Not that Meg was the chief reason why her grandmother had been left with a trained nurse and why she herself had been accompanied to Chicago. Her mother did wish to see her settled safely, but she also wished to talk things over with Professor Manly and to plan out a new textbook that was to reap still more State contracts. There was every reason to be spending money on the trip.

Some of the money went into a double room in a businessman's hotel right on the Midway, and paid for a big brass bed that had a big brass cuspidor beside it. But except for walking through long corridors or stopping at the desk about a key, Meg and her mother were seldom there except to sleep.

The evenings they spent at Professor Manly's. Under a lamp suspended by a long, linked metal chain, the two authors of school textbooks sat revising and revising in a hard white glare that beat down upon a study table. It was hard to think of them as

the same gay couple who had once started off to Boston to see Sarah Bernhardt or Duse and who were forever reading and discussing yellow-covered books by someone called D'Annunzio. *Paola and Francesca*. That, Meg could recall, had been a favorite. So had *Citta Morte*. There had been much talk about Love glorified by Art, or the other way around. Now there was talk about the proper moment to introduce the child to two- and then three-syllabled words.

Outside the glare, and separated from it by a Japanese curtain made by strands of colored beads, Meg shared a sofa with Miss Annie Manly, who had so acquired the habit of agreement with her brother that conversation with her had a way of buckling up and stopping short.

But in the daytime Meg was free to rove if she kept west of the Midway that ran through the South Side like a main artery. And she didn't mind the stockyard smell. She didn't mind the soot, if it was soot, all through the air, that gave the sky the deep thin purple gauze that was like the hanging of stage scenery. She had discovered Jackson Park with its lagoons and with its trees that had a steady rustle in their branches. And beyond them lay Lake Michigan that was unlike any stretch of water that she'd seen. Sometimes, very rarely, it was blue, but blue without a sparkle. More often it was dull, unless she kept on staring at it. Then it had subtleties of gray. Blown by a gale, in came tremendous waves that curled and broke without a hint of greenness, and came reaching up the stony slant of shore. Meg was never tired of looking at them, but her mother, on the few occasions when she went to walk, had eyes only for the leprous and decaying buildings left from the World's Fair.

Even with the stockyard smell left out, there was nothing in Chicago that she liked. She minced no words in saying so, even to Professor Manly. It took more, she said, than all the Rockefeller millions to hurry any university into being a real seat of learning, and more than President Harper's scouring of the Eastern colleges to make a brilliant faculty. Being lured by money did something to professors; and it was as though they'd lost their souls. Take him, take Professor Manly. He'd been a very different person when he'd been at Brown. He'd been a thorough student then,

who had let his work be interrupted only by the fewest friends. Here he was a drawing-card, so advertised, so publicized, with his least discovery blared through the land.

Certainly Meg had never seen her mother fit less well than she was doing at this very moment when she was applying at the office for a lodging place. The Secretary of Chicago University was being very stern with her.

"You can't hope," the Secretary was saying, "to get your daughter into any of the women's dormitories. She'll have to run her chance like all the other applicants." As a list was handed out, an impersonal voice was calling, "Next."

All around the glossy, varnished room and crowding slowly up the stairs were boys and girls and men and women of all ages. There seemed to be no end to those who wanted to be students in this great, raw, spreading place where several of the new stone halls were still shut off by scaffoldings; and those who were applying didn't look at all like students at Bryn Mawr or Brown.

Some were quite old and had tense, tired faces and gray hair. It was the younger ones who were exciting. They had strong, rugged bodies like those of farm people in Rhode Island. But they held their heads quite differently as though they had been used to taking in great sweeps of distance. Some had flat, foreign faces with broad noses and high cheekbones. Others had light hair that was the color of wood-shavings and the bright pink, mottled skin and very pale blue eyes and the clean scrubbed aspect of the Finns and Swedes who had begun to settle in Rhode Island. But what marked them all was a serious, greedy eagerness as though they didn't mean to miss one course that college had to give.

"Mother," Meg begged, "do we have to walk so fast? There's so much I'd like to notice."

At first there was no answer. As they got outside the campus, her mother was walking way ahead. The skirt of her dark green suit was being whipped back by the wind and the bronze cock-feathers in her hat were fluttering like a pennant.

"I haven't time to notice anything," she said. "The idea of boys and girls being huddled into the same places without any oversight. Before I leave for Providence, I've got to get you settled in a house that is at least respectable."

There was nothing for it but to try to keep up with her pace.

But were they never going to reach the ends of streets that cut each other sharply at right angles and that had a long monotony of houses that were all alike? Occasionally Meg saw her mother glance quickly at a number on a door, verify it with a number on the list, and hastily scratch off another name.

"Let's at least try one," Meg begged. "We don't have to hire a room if you don't like it. But at least we could sit down."

The same mixed helter-skelter crowd of students that they had kept meeting on their way was struggling up and down a flight of stubby steps made out of concrete flecked with shiny little bits of mica. The diamond window pane to the front door had curtains that were tied back in a kind of curtsey, and in the space between a young girl was staring out. As she led the way to a dark narrow hall lightened only by a square of amber-colored glass, she called up to the floor above, "Say, Momma, they're more coming. They're coming now as thick as spats."

Being "spats" was, Meg knew, something that her mother didn't like and wasn't used to. As she sat stiffly in her chair, her profile looked a little like a haughty and disgusted camel's. "There's such a thing," she said, "there is such a thing as taste."

But the reason why they left was really such a silly reason. It wasn't because of the stuffed furniture, or the coarse dingy curtains, or the big jardinières that were mottled green and yellow and that each held a dusty imitation palm. All of a sudden Meg had seen her mother's gaze focus on a black piano and had watched her staring at some dog-eared, brightly-colored sheets of music. On the topmost one, Meg read the title, "Mamie Is A Grand Old Name."

"You can't stay here," her mother said, "not if I have to yank you back to Providence."

"Yank" was a word that Meg hadn't heard her use for years and then only when she was upset. Anybody'd have to laugh at such a reason for their quick departure.

"It's not a joke," her mother said, "though I shouldn't wonder if you'd like to stay there. You're always wanting to get local color in your stories. But I won't have my daughter batting around in rooming houses. John Manly ought to know I wouldn't. Just be-

cause he's found the 'Lost Leaf' to *Piers Plowman* doesn't mean that he has any common sense. He hasn't."

By this time, Meg was hurrying to catch up.

"I know exactly what I'll do," her mother said. "I'll put you in the very house he told me not to go to. Then maybe we'll be getting somewhere. It won't hurt you not to own a Shelley."

"Why can't I own a Shelley?"

"Because you can't and be allowed to stay there. Not if his own daughter couldn't."

"Whose own daughter?"

"The Reverend Mr. Dickinson's," Meg's mother said. "He tossed Shelley's poems out the window and his daughter out the door for owning them. You're going to have the room she had to leave, if I can manage it. If John Manly wants to laugh at Baptist ministers he can, but after all they do have standards. You may have to gather round a wheezy, broken-down melodion and sing 'Hosannah in the Highest' after supper. But at least I'll know that you aren't singing 'Mamie Is A Grand Old Name.' "

As they retraced their steps, they were getting nearer to the University. At last there were neat, oblong lawns that had houses that were different from each other, though each had a walk that was bordered with hydrangea bushes whose clumps of flowers had turned to rusty red. Meg saw her mother heading towards a slate-colored house that rose up to a pointed roof. In the peak of its third story was a sharp black crescent that might be a balcony. But if the Dickinsons lived here, they hadn't any use for balconies. Meg was standing on a porch that was devoid of chairs.

The room where she would sing "Hosannah" had very high gray walls and against a long, blind window, where the velvet mouse-colored curtains were pulled to, stood a table with a marble top on which were magazines that had religious titles. Over the upright black piano, on which was a solitary hymnal marked with a gold cross, hung an enormous steel engraving in a wide black frame. It was a Doré Bible picture that years ago had made Meg feel resentful. Hagar had never meant to do a wicked thing, yet there she was with young Ishmael beside her; and on the ground was her only crock of water broken, with the thinnest trickle seeping from its side. Who would want to stay here looking at her?

Who would want to think of seeing her for months and months? Rather Grandma Simmons's bison and her Mormon Elders, if an adventure in the West was going to end up here.

And apparently it was. Meg listened to her mother talking to a very fierce and rigid little minister who was so seeped of blood that even his ear lobes were waxy white. Beside him sat his little silent wife who had a sad, kind, crumpled face. Sometimes she nodded when her husband spoke, but while Meg tried to keep her eyes on a brown photograph of "Christ among the Money Changers," she could feel herself the object of a careful scrutiny.

"Your daughter's big," she heard a thin voice say, "and the room we have to rent is very small."

However small the room, it seemed that Meg would manage to fit into it. Its size was not important. What was important, what was an occasion for the deepest thankfulness, was that she should be left here in safe hands.

There was nothing that she felt like saying to her mother as they walked back to the Manlys'. This was almost their last day together and she should be speaking of her gratitude about her room and her delight in a safe shelter. But Meg kept on seeing "Hagar in the Wilderness." Hers was going to be a different kind of wilderness, but it would be as thirsty and as dry and bleak.

Through dinner, Professor Manly tried to draw her out. She was not to feel, he said, that she had to take his courses. They were pretty bleak and academic and what he wanted for her was to lose a little of the Bryn Mawr influence and to wake up to what was going on around her in America. There was a good course in the Modern Novel and another in the Modern Drama. She knew that she was being very silent while his Southern voice went softly on.

It was much later, when they'd moved into the library, that her mother told him what she'd done about a room.

"The only trouble is Meg's trunk," she finished off. "She'll never get it through the door, but that's the only trouble."

He made no comment. Meg thought that he agreed until her own gaze met a clear blue eye and it communicated. Better to let things slide, it said. Better to accept the situation for the time. Far wiser for the moment to pretend. But not for very long would she have to dwell with Hagar. There was a promise that she caught.

It was assuring her that she only had to wait until her mother had gone back to Providence.

On the little sofa she was sitting with Miss Annie Manly, who was so glad, she said, that Meg was going to dwell in a safe Christian household. So easily these days young people departed from that influence. Take the Graduate Students who came here to tea . . .

At the big study desk beneath the hard white glare, Professor Manly was discussing details of the new English Reader in a final consultation. At last, when it was time to leave, Meg watched her mother gather up a multitude of books and papers. Then while Miss Manly was being thanked for all her courtesy and kindness, there was a change of seats. It was Meg who was sitting in the brightness and feeling utterly defenseless before a gaze that was amused.

"I tucked a book in the pocket of your coat," Professor Manly said in a low voice. "Not Shelley. Shelley's served his turn. I thought we'd leave the matter of your freedom to old Strindberg. Keep him locked away till the right time. Then trot him out. He'll get you fired straight out of doors and do the trick for you. When he does, then let me know."

Soon Meg and her mother were outside in the streets that were lighted faintly by gas lamps that stood on tall black posts at every corner and Professor Manly was seeing them to their hotel that faced the Midway.

Tomorrow Meg was going to move into the room that was so very small for her. Dreadfully she wanted to confide that she didn't mean to stay there; that if she did, there wouldn't be the slightest use in coming to Chicago. But if she told, she'd spoil the last time that she and her mother would have together for a long, long while.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

While she walked up to the University, Meg kept glancing at her father's letter that had been lying in the hall on a black walnut table.

"There's something funny and a little sad," it started off, "in your mother's stowing you in a strict Baptist household. It shows how much she would have liked to bundle you right up and bring you back with her to Providence. There are many moments when I wish she had, but at any rate she seems to think she's left you safe."

"Something funny and a little sad." That was not the way it felt to be moved into the Dickinsons'; but what her father meant, Meg understood. Her mother hadn't been inside a church for years and had only made Meg go as a companion to her grandfather. Yet suddenly a Baptist household had seemed to offer solace and security. "Nothing can happen to you here, not possibly," her mother had said more than once as she had helped unpack the trunk that was so big it had to stand out in the upper hall.

Well, in the sense that her mother meant it, nothing, Meg knew, could happen to her at the Dickinsons'. Her tiny room on the third floor was papered with the palest of pale morning-glories that looked as though they had been sapped of any natural hue. When she dressed, there was just room enough for her to stand between the cot and the white enamel bureau, and she had to edge her chair in sidewise while she studied at the table on which stood a nickel-plated lamp, the shade of which was bottle-green. The shallow closet took manœuvring; and to get into it she had to move a little wooden washstand, which was all the other furniture there was.

But her cramped quarters didn't make her safe. Her father knew they didn't. "If you think," he had written further down the page, "if you think your mind is getting risky with all sorts of new, enormous thoughts, find someone you can talk to. Or talk at. Remember Hamlet and the grave-diggers. A street-cleaner's better than a certain sort of solitude."

Her father was aware that four walls couldn't keep her snug. She had already found out that they couldn't. Hadn't she often looked off to the east and a gray pall of sky and at the one window through which Shelley's poems had been sent spinning because they spelled a certain sort of danger? Wasn't she reading books and plays that might very well be flung out after them?

Because of them, however, she could sit through the long graces that the Reverend Mr. Dickinson bestowed upon the nightly dinners that began with white potato soup and ended with white watery blanc mange. When the almost silent meals were over, she could sit politely in the parlor for as long as need be and take a secret pleasure in staring at "Hagar in the Wilderness." No matter what, she wasn't stranded in a desert. She was attending lectures at Chicago University and some of them were more exciting than she had supposed that lectures could be.

Strange opinions and beliefs were blowing all around her and they seemed as fierce and buffeting as the winds that blew across the Midway, making in from the Great Lakes.

But there was no one she could talk to. Or at, for that matter. In the late afternoon, she was welcome at Professor Manly's but what she found was a high, heated conversation that was way above her head.

Mostly it concerned a man named Dewey, who it seemed was creating "Pandemonium Let-Loose" in a school that he directed for the children of the faculty. There were those who believed in "following the child"—whatever that was?—but there were some who didn't and who longed for good old-fashioned discipline. Meg sat very still and thought of Mother's Kindergarten. There, the only "following of any child" had been so awful that she still remembered it. A boy had said a word so horrid that he'd had to have his mouth washed out with soap, and all the other children had trooped upstairs and stood outside the bathroom door to watch his punishment take place.

It was more fun at Professor Manly's when the conversation turned to somebody called Veblen. People got most excited over him and the moment that his name was mentioned a lovely phrase was used: "The Leisure Classes." It made Meg think of long, slow, sunny mornings when she had been visiting at Newport with nothing more imperative to do with time than to sit gazing off across a lawn that sloped gently to the sea or to set forth on the Ocean Drive in a victoria. But it seemed that "leisure" was a wicked thing, wicked and extravagant, and that "idlers were just drones" who ought to be killed off if human workers had the common sense of bees in building a society. Meg kept her own

thoughts to herself, while she chose the pleasant, charming idlers whom she'd want to save.

Only once, a lady with black brittle eyes had turned to her as though she were worth speaking to. "I won't be a fringe," the lady had said, "upon the life of any man." But she couldn't be, not even if she wanted to. A fringe was soft and silken and it set off a shawl. It was as beautiful as the part that held a Paisley pattern or Chinese embroidery. "I think I'd rather like to be a fringe," Meg had said shyly; and at once the lady had looked as though she'd wasted a remark and had moved off to another chair.

At Professor Manly's the interest lay in listening. That he liked to have her come, Meg knew; but he had no time to talk to her. Sometimes as she left, he asked her when she thought she'd have to use old Strindberg; and when she told him that she hadn't got around to reading Strindberg yet because she was too busy, Professor Manly had laughed and said he was reminding her that she had gunpowder in reserve.

What he didn't seem to guess was that she had no chance of making friends. Every time she had to speak in class, there was something in her voice that made the other Graduate Students stare at her with distrust.

All except this middle-aged and heavy-featured man who had just caught up with her and joined her. He was saying that he thought she wouldn't mind because he sat right next to her in Professor Tolman's "Shakespeare" and that she must have noticed how much he admired her work. How could she help noticing when he used his big flat palms like clapping cymbals at the end of every paper that she read?

As he swung along beside her, his hands were deep down in the pockets of a raglan overcoat that was belted so high up that the heavy folds stuck out in plaits; and as he tried one subject and another, he kept glancing at her sidewise from under a fedora hat that was made of dark green plush and that had a little yellow feather stuck into its band like a Malvolio touch.

Was she a horrid Eastern snob? Sometimes she'd heard that term as she'd gone down the corridor. She had wanted so to turn and say she wasn't one and that she'd be so glad if somebody would speak to her and make her feel included. But the ones she

liked the look of were the ones who might have come off prairie farms, and who took full notes of every spoken word and seemed so eager after education. If a man was going to walk along with her and stop her from reading further in her father's letter, she did wish that her companion wouldn't wear a green fedora and a silly yellow feather. She wouldn't care if he was threadbare. Otherwise she wished that he was dressed a little more like someone she was used to. Yes, like Gid, who was now working in his father's New York office and who wouldn't write to her, not even once.

"How's your paper on the *Sonnets* coming on?" this man was asking. "You know I've made a lot of notes for you. I thought we'd find a quiet corner in the Library."

But she didn't want to find a quiet corner in the Library and discuss the warm and lovely passages in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

"I'm awfully sorry," Meg was saying. "You see, I want my work to be just mine."

"I was suggesting a good way to get acquainted. That's how we do it out here," the man said.

Get acquainted and then what? Wasn't this the chancy sort of thing her mother had made her safe from? The Dickinsons' cold parlor was the place to end a conversation, not continue it. But even if it weren't, she didn't have to be afraid of this encounter. No one could look more humble and less like one of Grandma Simmons's Mormon Elders than this man who wore a green fedora. It was quite all right, she was assuring him. And, no, she wasn't in the least offended. She did appreciate his offer. Only . . .

Only. What a silly little word it was to use. Yet it was big enough to send him off discomfited. Meg was going by herself into the ugly big stone hall, then up the staircase that was panelled with bright golden oak and finally into the lecture room where she was often scared by what she heard.

The desks were filling up with Graduate Students and in a moment Professor Schütze would come in and start to talk on Modern Drama, which he called "a vehicle." It seemed strange that at Bryn Mawr no one on the Faculty had seemed to think it worth considering, when Professor Schütze said it was the strongest vehicle of modern thought.

The more Ibsen plays Meg read, the stronger it did seem, and she didn't see how she herself was going to use it. But she was. All the students in the class would have to write a four-act play as soon as they had learned a little more about technique.

Somehow technique didn't seem so overwhelming as thinking up a plot that would induce the characters to use the exits and the entrances that Meg had learned to put so carefully on paper. And how was she going to find a "driving impulse" that would lead the characters "front stage" and make them go through a "big moment"? Whom had she ever seen have a big moment? Hadn't she been taught that scenes were things to be avoided at all costs?

Besides, every single Ibsen play that she was reading had to do with marriage, and not the kind of marriage that people had in Providence. There a few did get divorced, but only for the worst cause that there was; and even then there was an awful scandal. Nearly everyone was sure that a lady should put up with anything before she stooped to washing dirty linen right in public. Wasn't that what is was called and wasn't it usually said that no wife need acknowledge that she knew about her husband's peccadilloes? A peccadillo sounded light and trivial and as airy as a shuttlecock. It wasn't horrifying like a stigma which a wife who got divorced could stamp upon her children, making them share her shame.

But Ibsen didn't think that a stigma was important. What was important was an utter naked frankness between married people. It was more important than children or their home.

Professor Schütze had come in and was standing up behind the rostrum; and more than anything he was reminding Meg of a clean bath-towel that had just come home from the steam laundry. He gave off the same kind of cleanliness, and his neat, straight German features looked as though someone had been very careful in ironing all the edges and pressing all the proper creases and doing a little of the finest fluting round his mouth. If he only didn't seem so scrubbed, there'd be some chance of not believing him. If he'd been dark-browed and sallow and blue-shaven, Meg felt that she could think that he was evil-minded. But no one so immaculate invented horrors. Besides, he was talking of nobility in his slightly guttural, foreign voice.

"Rosmer was the born idealist," he said. "His nobility required an utter candor from Rebecca. To prove her love, she gave him that as purely as a woman yields up her virginity. Her yielding marked the consummation of their marriage. It was complete for the short while it lasted."

But it had lasted only through one conversation, only until they had decided that they'd plunge into the stream and die together in the mill-race. How could their marriage be complete? How ever in the world?

Professor Schütze was now talking of those who lived together with no mating of the soul and spirit. That was the vilest sin there was. Not another one was comparable.

If that was true, what about the older couples on both sides of her own family? Were they all vile? They didn't think so. Most of them had stuck it out and believed that they were showing character. There was Cousin Belle who lived next door. Who cared more for wealth, wealth and position and what she called "the right connections"? Yet she had not deserted Cousin Charlie when he'd lost his money and couldn't give her what was suited to her station. She might behave a little like an exiled queen, but she took pride in being at her consort's side.

And there were Grandmother and Grandfather, who almost never spoke directly to each other. All the same, there were the questions that they asked. "Is Mrs. Simmons taken sick?" "Has Mr. Simmons set out in this weather?" They kept on worrying just as they kept on staying under the same roof and sharing the same bed. And would either of them be more noble separate? Certainly it didn't seem so. What about Father and Mother too? Meg speculated. Surely they had never thought that they could mate their souls and spirits. Ibsen would have called them sinful from the start.

One thing she knew. She was glad that they were sinful. This very moment she would like to be back home and hear them laughing at each other. It was not mean laughter ever, but it did spring from each seeming to the other so absurdly different. The difference was what they most enjoyed. Had there ever been a time when she hadn't liked to hear them arguing and poking fun?

Besides, hadn't they an admiration for the very qualities that

made each of them so separate? Hadn't she always heard her father say that he took his hat off to her mother's pluck and gallantry, even when he found it hard to live with? Or to what he termed her tribal loyalty, even though he didn't like the Simmonses? Or to her nerve in teaching any subject in the world? "Lordy," Meg could hear him saying, "I do believe if I applied, you'd tell me that you'd teach me Botany." "I would," Meg could hear her mother answering. "I'd do it too. I could if you gave me a good textbook and let me keep a page ahead."

And underneath all this there was her father's trust that was unfailing. He must guess that there were things Meg knew, and very gently he'd removed the weight of them. "If you ever need to think of loyalty," he'd said, "you can test it by your mother's. You won't find a better test."

If Meg had ever doubted it, she'd never had the least doubt of her mother's admiration for his mind or for his very special humor, or for his courtesy, or for certain other qualities. One was his gentleness. Another was his tolerance. Another was a kind of child-like trust in people.

Were any parents less alike, less capable of mating soul and spirit? And if they'd been more capable, Meg wondered if she would not have had to forfeit what were the richest memories of them that she had.

While she'd sat thinking, she had barely heard a word of Professor Schütze's discourse upon *Rosmersholm*. Vaguely she'd been conscious of the word "sincerity," which had been said so many times that it echoed in her ears. Now of all authors, he was assigning Strindberg, whom he didn't call old Strindberg. Not at all. Strindberg was the fount and source from which had flowed so many streams.

Anyhow the students were to read *The Dance of Death* if they could get their hands on it. If they couldn't, any of the author's plays gave his philosophy of life.

At any rate there was no need for her, Meg felt, to go up to the Library and run the risk of an encounter with the green fedora. Locked up in her bureau drawer was her own copy that was meant to serve another special purpose. If she walked straight home and didn't stop off at the Manlys', she could do her homework before

supper, and who knew? A play that had to be locked up till it was used as a means to freedom, ought to put some spice and flavor even in the white potato soup.

Now that she had turned her key in the front door, there was not a sound in the whole house, although Meg knew that it was occupied. Somewhere were two mated souls and spirits who knew she had come in and was going up the flights of stairs to her own room. They could hear her move the little wooden washstand as she put her hat up on the closet shelf. But they couldn't know that, once she had lit the lamp, she had taken out a book that they wouldn't use a pair of tongs to handle. But she had, and she had turned to the first page that was brightened by a hard round yellow glow from the lighted student lamp.

The Spider. The play was rightly bound in coffin-black. Strindberg meant the title and the whole conception to be horrible. Though Meg was sitting near the radiator, she felt cold.

Actually in nature, where a fact was a straight fact, had she minded what went on? Hadn't she seen it happen? Hadn't her father told her all about it? Out in the back yard in Cushing Street, hadn't they stood together watching a big, bloated, lemon-yellow spider? The spider had seemed sluggish and deliberative until, with a quick movement, she had snatched a smaller spider from her back and eaten it. "There goes the male," Meg's father had explained. "He's served his only purpose." It had to be like that, he'd said, when reproduction was so plentiful; and, looked at one way, it was as good a death as any other and the end was swift and clean.

But Strindberg's Spider-Woman meant the process to be slow; and when it was transferred to human life, she had all sorts of subtle means of torture. Contempt was much the worst. Suppose a man was always being ridiculed and sneered at, was always being told that he was old and through and was allowed to live on sufferance?

Contempt could be distilled into the strongest venom and then given drop by drop until it killed, but never quickly. Suppose a man did try to get away and lead a solitary life and find some sort of self-respect in his own work, and the woman wouldn't let him have that refuge? Say, she sought him out in the corner that he'd

crawled to and kept feeding the same poison till he was too weak to make another struggle and died by infinitely small degrees?

But women didn't act like that. Or perhaps they did in Scandinavia. Maybe the rigors of a cold, bleak climate changed them, just as it changed the habits of wild creatures. Maybe when women lived by frozen fjords and ice-floes, they began to act like some strange species in a book of Darwin's that dealt with a survival of the fittest. Only why weren't men the fittest? If killing was in order, why didn't they kill off their mates? They were stronger, surely. Or were they only stronger physically? Had they simpler and more childlike minds and did female minds possess a greater strength that came from cunning? Did they work quietly and deviously and very, very slowly until no man saw his own destruction till it was too late?

Anyhow, women weren't like that, not in America. Or were they if she thought about them honestly? Meg was staring down at Strindberg's play, yet what she was really seeing was a page in Grandma Simmons's family album. She was remembering a photograph of Grandpa Simmons in his youth.

In that photograph he was not a person who'd steal off to quiet corners. What had made him change?

Grandma Simmons had. Meg's own darling, fierce, and angry little Grandma Simmons. Of all unlikely people, Grandpa had been "good stage" and had one big dramatic moment. There had been the day when he had made the family all troop into the parlor and had ranged them right beneath the portrait of his father, the old Senator, and had kept waltzing up and down the floor as though he was possessed. How carefully Grandpa had planned his climax, as though he knew the rules of Modern Drama. Right in the open fire he'd burned the mortgage that he'd held on the Simmons Homestead. Meg could see Grandmother watching him and waiting till they were alone before she asked, "Was my wedding dowry in with what you pitched away?" It must have been right after that that she'd begun to make him pay by humbling him with her contempt. It had gone on day after day, year after year, with an intent to hurt but not to kill.

Worse than that was the thought of other memories that she was trying hard to shy away from. Father's rooms way up on the

third floor. Why and when had he first had them? Had he ever truly wished the peace and quiet that had been given steadily as the reason for his being so remote? And how had he felt when Mother had started to earn money and to swing the family? People sometimes spoke as though his salary didn't count and there was almost nothing he contributed. Then there was the awful time when he had lost his job at Brown. "Your father's old. He's old and sick. You can't blame the trustees for telling him it's time that he retired." Not all the laughter in the household helped with that.

Meg didn't want to think about it. She wasn't going to think about those dreadful days when Father'd seemed a culprit.

Before she knew it, she was staring out a window she had opened. Strindberg had followed Shelley and it was she who had flung him out. He had gone hurtling through the night, sped by her hand.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Meg had come to class a little early so that she could sit in the front row and look closely at the author of a problem novel.

Marriage, by Robert Herrick. Every time she passed the College Book Store, she saw one window filled with dark green cloth-bound volumes that said, *Marriage*, in gold letters. The title seemed abrupt and flat and final. It was like a sign that read, "Private Grounds, No Trespassing," as though the whole vast subject was a great estate owned by one man to the exclusion of everybody else.

And how could one man know all there was to say or marriage? Even though he watched how other people carried on their lives, could he judge very deeply by other than his own experience? Besides, at Professor Manly's, hadn't she heard people say that Robert Herrick had set down his intimate, personal life, had set it down "unblushingly"? Wasn't that the word they used?

Purposely, it seemed, he began his college work a whole month late to show that he came out to Chicago University on his own

terms and was someone very special, so special that even right at the last moment he might change his mind and not appear at all.

Certainly, now that he was actually walking in the door, he was behaving differently from other members of the Faculty. It wasn't just that he was wearing very British tweeds and carrying a stick. More than anything, it was his manner. He had the air of making a stage entrance for an audience that he'd kept waiting till he chose to play the lead. What's more, he was less unblushing than contemptuous. He did have a fine brow, but his dark, sagging, melancholy eyes were regarding his assembled class with something more than boredom, and his small pink mouth was drawn close in a pout like the pout of a baby who didn't like much having to grow up.

Now that he was sitting at his desk, he had interlaced his hands and propped his chin on them.

"Before I begin my lecture," he was saying, "I have my usual request to make. I must advise you that your presence in my class cannot be said to constitute a social contact. It is my custom to require my students to spare me the annoyance of being recognized in any way when I have to set foot on the campus."

Up surged the memory of her father. Meg could see him leaving Maxcey Hall swarmed about by students who felt that they could hook an arm in his or carry his tin botany case and be quite sure he liked their company. What made Mr. Herrick feel that he could be so lordly? And if he had to set foot on the college campus, who had made him do it? None of his class, at any rate. They weren't the ones who had offered him the most enormous salary to leave Harvard, which he loved, for Chicago, which he hated. He had no right to take his self-despisal out on them.

Besides, if he looked around the room, could not he see the eager earnest look on the faces of those who had come to listen to him? There was a kind of touching tribute in that eagerness; all the more because some of the students had obviously pinched and scraped and done without for the privilege of being here. They weren't asking for a social contact. If anything, they were too humble and were accepting a toploftiness with meekness, as though the faintest sign of personal interest would be too much to expect.

Up at his desk Mr. Herrick sat aloof, and slowly turned a dark-red signet ring around one finger. Then he unstrapped a handsome

leather briefcase and stacked a pile of notes with ineffectual white hands.

"Before we reach the modern novel," he began, "we shall perforce step back into the nineteenth century. The translations in the Library may be considered adequate for what I shall assign to you."

But at Chicago, far more than at Bryn Mawr, Meg heard foreign tongues used as a fluent native speech. It was she who sometimes had to use the spiritless translations.

"I shall not assign the *Comédie Humaine*," Mr. Herrick said. "That is too much to expect. But you must know your Balzac at least to the extent of reading through *Père Goriot*. You must know your Flaubert at least to the extent of reading *Mme. Bovary*." He paused to let his scorn sink in before he added, "Balzac you will not understand. Flaubert you will not enjoy."

Meg hadn't meant to speak, yet words were slipping out in spite of her intention.

"I have read *Mme. Bovary*," she said. "I've read it and I did enjoy it."

If he lashed out at her for her impertinence, she didn't care. At least she had spoken for the class and had protested that he shouldn't sweep them all aside and take stupidity for granted. But as her voice stopped, his sombre eyes met hers.

"Ah," she heard him say. "A cultivated voice! So, like myself, you are an exile from the East."

In an instant she knew what his remarks had done to her. The atmosphere of the whole room had changed and it was she, not he, who was the object of hostility. This was like being in a dreadful dream. A creature would feel like this if it had wandered in among a herd not of its kind and stood out as being different; was hated and resented for that difference, too.

"I'm not an exile," she protested. "How can I be an exile when I came on purpose? Besides, I like it here. In lots of ways I like it better than Bryn Mawr. It's only that I haven't any chance of making friends."

Mr. Herrick had no interest in her plight. How little it concerned him, he was showing by starting in to dictate lecture notes and she was writing on and on. One by one, she was scribbling down familiar names, aware of old associations that she had with

them. They seemed like single bricks that she could use to build a wall that shut her in from the resentment that she felt on every side.

Now that Mr. Herrick's voice had ceased at last, what was she going to do? Sit here and wait till everyone had left? That seemed the wisest plan. But in the midst of all the scuffle and confusion of departure, a shadow fell across her desk and didn't move.

A girl in a golf skirt and blue sweater was standing close beside her. Meg had noticed her before because she seemed so careless and so independent. Besides, she went about the campus carrying a wooden yellow soap-box. Sometimes she set it down and stood on it with her tall thin body braced against a lamp-post. Then with her head thrown back and her mouth shaped like an O, she began to speak to the thin air till very gradually a crowd collected. She made Meg think of young St. John and his voice crying in the wilderness, except that when Meg had stopped to listen, she hadn't heard a word about religion. The girl had been preaching about something called "the single tax."

At any rate the girl was now holding out her hand that felt very long and hard and firm.

"Grab up your things and come along." She gave the words like a quick order. "You said you'd like to have a friend. Well, then, I'll get you in. You'll only have to say you are a comrade if they ask you. We'll hear Emma Goldman speak on anarchy. But hurry up. You're late."

Where they went to didn't matter in the least. What Meg wanted was to be a comrade and to be with someone her own age. It was hard work to keep up with the loping stride that led her on as they headed down the Midway, but when at last they had climbed the stairs that led to the dark, lumbering El, and had found seats together, Meg was talking as she hadn't talked for weeks.

Mostly she was answering questions. But her companion didn't seem to mind her ignorance. The most ardent zealots, the girl said, were those who came from ignorance and bigotry. It seemed that Meg was going to be a zealot. The word made her feel as though she'd have to act a little like an early Christian until she heard that her religion was the last thing that she'd have to be concerned with. She was to be a convert. But to what?

To some cause apparently that was kept alive in slums as fervently and furtively as Christianity had once been kept alive deep in the catacombs. But these slums were different from the ones in Providence, where there was a heartiness about saloons that said "Free Lunch" and that had friendly shuttered doors that showed a lot of feet in close companionship along a low brass railing and that were always letting out or taking in a group of red-faced, laughing Irishmen as though there were some sort of club inside.

Here in a sort of unreal smoky twilight, Meg and her escort were walking down the length of a gray street among gray people who had no relation to each other. Some of them had pushcarts strung with jangling bells and filled with vegetables, mostly cabbage heads that looked as though a very sooty pencil had smirched an outline even around the very tightest center leaves. On each side of the street, little grimy buildings were squeezed together in a row and were blackened by long ladders that were fire-escapes. But where the fire-escapes turned into narrow balconies, bedclothes and mattresses and comforters bulged out and sagged down towards the floor below and on them, women leaned their arms and shouted at each other or at little dark-skinned children who were playing in the gutter and who paid no heed. And, everywhere there were old men with tight black skull caps and long, yellowish, grizzled beards, who put back their heads and cut through the constant noise with high, raw voices. They spread their fingers. Then they closed their fists and pointed out the wares they had for sale.

At last Meg found that her companion was stopping at a door that was cut like a thin narrow slit into a wall that was pasted thick with overlapping posters. The top ones hadn't stuck very well and had peeled up enough to show some portion of a more than life-sized face below them. Sometimes it was just a heavy jowl and a thick pair of lips, sometimes just half of a big, vigorous jutting nose or part of an enormous ear belonging to the picture underneath.

As Meg stepped into the entrance, she was halted by a young Jew in a suit of purplish blue. Despite his spidery build, he seemed very strong and violent and he didn't like her looks.

"Wrong address," he said. "Just keep on walking, lady, and

you'll get to Hull House. You go do your calling on Jane Addams. We ain't got any use for pottery and weaving."

Quickly Meg heard her new companion interpose herself. "Listen, Abe," the girl was saying, "I brought this friend of mine. She's going to be a comrade."

"The hell she is," said the young Jew. "But, Sister, it's O.K. by me if you're responsible."

With that, he let the two of them pass by.

The dim hall that they were entering was like a shallow basin and it was mostly filled with men who were chattering away in an excited babel that was English when Meg listened carefully, but that sounded like a mixture of strange foreign tongues. The men had sallow faces and bright, darting eyes and quick, excited voices; and they seemed to like to sit with one arm thrust out around the nearest chair back and with their shoulders hunched and their legs sprawled out in front. But the one next to Meg's seat wanted to be friendly.

"You're late," he said. "They've sung the *Marseillaise* and given out the Literature. Have mine."

He had put some leaflets and some pamphlets and a brown paper-covered volume in her lap.

"Thoreau" the title read. That was a name she knew at any rate. But what connection had these little indoor men with someone who had scorned a roof and made a world of Walden Pond; a world where his quick eye had patiently observed the habits of wild creatures?

Her neighbor must have noticed her perplexity.

"Goldman always gives that copy out," he said. "It gives her a head start on the police. The cops can't stop her passing out a book like that."

Up on the stage were two enormous pots of aspidistras and in the space between them was a rather chunky little woman who, it seemed, was Emma Goldman. Though she had a tough, seamed face with Jewish features, she had light cinnamon-colored hair and she wore a badly fitting, baggy dark blue suit that sagged unevenly about her legs as she paced up and down the stage. But above all, she had the pugnacity and perkiness of a small bantam rooster that liked to pick a fight and bristled with vitality.

"We take our leadership straight from Thoreau," she said. "He was the first American anarchist."

How queer! Though he had been a byword in her house, Meg had never heard that mystifying name applied to him. A born American naturalist was what she'd heard him called; a great American naturalist who was never tired of watching what went on in a world that few other people noticed. He had made exciting all that tiny to-and-fro beneath a piece of bark or the furious life existing in a spongy tussock or a piece of sod.

"Thoreau put up a tough scrap," the woman was continuing. "He put up a tough scrap against the law of Massachusetts. He went to jail for his convictions."

It was difficult to think there'd ever been a jail in Concord or any need for one. Of all the places she had seen, it had seemed to Meg the quietest. Of course there was the little bridge where had stood the embattled farmers, but she had felt that their shot rang round the world because it had got off to a good start by shattering utter peace.

"Thoreau meant to overthrow all laws," she heard the woman say. "He knew they were the foulest, basest insult to the individual soul."

Meg knew now what the trouble was. The woman was speaking of some other man who chanced to carry the same name. The one whose picture Meg had seen upon her father's desk would not have had a thing to do with crowds and gathering them to overthrow the law. In the picture, he was leaning forward on a stave that he might have cut himself and glancing out from a thick thatch of eyebrows with innocent and childlike eyes. Like any of the chipmunks that he loved, he would be quick to dart away and scurry off from the tumult in this hall.

"If we're going to be true followers of Thoreau," the woman's voice went on, "then we'll put up a tough scrap and band and fight together. We must fight against the State and we must fight against the Government. Down with them both. We have no flag. We have no country."

Why, she was using exactly the same words that Meg had once heard spoken at West Point. But then they had been said by Southern ladies who had truly suffered from the consequences of

a civil war. Everyone had understood and few had minded. But this woman on the stage was demanding war of a new sort.

"Class against class," she shouted out. "The poor against the rich; the working man against the lousy plutocrat. There'll be no plutocrats by the time that we get through with them."

Loud, noisy cheers were booming out and echoing through the hall, cheers for Emma Goldman; cheers for somebody called Reitman; cheers for Anarchy. Then a voice yelled "To hell with the United States." It was picked up like a chorus and multiplied by many throats though sometimes it changed. "To hell with the President of the United States," the cry boomed out . . .

Meg knew that there was something that she ought to do or say. No matter if she stood alone, she had to do it. She was mounting on her chair and yelling too. Nobody paid the least attention. They didn't want to hear about the Stars and Stripes or how people felt about it at West Point or how they rose in homage to it as the Color Bearer passed them at Parade. They didn't want to hear about Benedict Arnold and his shield reversed in the church chancel and the disgrace that happened to a traitor's name forever and forever. Even her companion had gone down the aisle to join the crowd that was surging round the stage. "You'll get yourself mobbed in half a sec," a man's voice said and Meg felt herself dragged to the floor.

Then suddenly the whole scene changed. Police were on the stage. With their sticks swinging, they came charging on it from the wings. First, very solemnly, two of them were upturning the big pots of aspidistras. Others were putting out the lights and yanking down the banners and the draperies. Then last of all, one of them had grabbed the woman who was Emma Goldman. He had grabbed her round the waist and he didn't care how much her skirts bunched up or how her legs kicked out or how she clawed at his red face. Once he hit her straight across the mouth and then he handled her as though she was a sack of meal.

The next thing Meg knew, she was staring down into the dirty bowl of a black hat. Below a band stained yellow with sweat, there was a scattering of coins that a man was jingling up and down.

"Come on," he said. "Come on and loosen up. Be speedy with your change. We've got to bail her out again."

Although her purse was shut, Meg could feel her hand tightening on the clasp as she went on answering, "No."

"No" was the only word she seemed to have to say to anything or anybody. She was using it to other hats half-filled with coins, and to sheets of paper that were scrawled across with names, and to bright red banners she was asked to buy to help the cause.

Then though she was being buffeted around, she was making up the aisle among a lot of faces that were tallow-gray and that seemed more menacing because they didn't flush with anger. The anger was so deep it didn't blaze. It was secret, smouldering, frightening. It would be pitiless and savage too, if it had any power to be. Meg was sensing terror of a sort she'd never met before. It pursued her even when she got outside.

One thing she knew. She wasn't going to search for any comrade. Dusk had fallen and lights were pricking through the blackness. But from far off came the distant thunder of the El and Meg was running towards it. Grandma Simmons had been right about the West. It was a region fraught with danger; worse dangers than she guessed.

✧ PART FIVE ✧

PROVIDENCE

CHAPTER XL

At first Meg had been glad to be home again in Providence, especially since it was early June. On the lower part of Cushing Street, the lindens were in bloom. The air was sticky-sweet, as Gid had said, how many years ago? And on the sidewalk were scatterings of tiny flowers that had been white before they fell and drifted underfoot.

True, she had had to know at once that one awful thing had happened. The Maxcey house across the way from hers was occupied and it had been completely altered by a lady who had been quick to see its "possibilities."

Those possibilities had taken shape in an enormous wing with a sun porch like the side of an excursion steamer. It had great, gleaming windows in a row, and they kept no company with the tiny panes of glass set in the simple framework of the small farmhouse that she'd always known. The new wing was a thing apart. It towered and loomed and, almost worst of all, it had destroyed the little latticed well with its margin of green fern blades and its breath of coolness that came up from hidden water sources. Gone, too, were the cherry trees with their great girth and deeply creviced bark and broken branches. And where there had been a tangle of briar roses, was a neat herbaceous border. Each plant belonged to its own stake and stood out as being very separate and special. The small porch where she and Gid had liked to sit was left. But it was so spruced up and glossed with paint and stripped of honeysuckle vines that it had ceased to be familiar. Even if Gid were home, even if they could have the front steps to themselves, they would never seek out their old haunt. The place that they had loved was spoiled.

But the front garden bed to her own house was just the same. At this time of year, it was dim and green with elm shade and was only suitable for ferns and for the wax begonias that she had

helped her mother to set out among them, careful to firm back the tiny bulbs of crocuses that had slowly drained their life down into their brown corms.

And out in the back yard, not a thing was different. Filling one angle of the high, brown ugly fence stood the tall Persian lilac. This had been one of its years to bloom; for too high above Meg's head to clip were sprays now turned to rusty red and tipped with the beginnings of hard seed pods. Every day, the Oriental poppies burst their hairy buds and uncrinkled their great flaming petals, and the peonies had begun to sag and lop beneath their weight of rounding, globelike blooms.

"You never used to care so much for cultivated flowers," her mother had remarked. "You never used to glance at them."

That was true. Meg knew she hadn't. But in Chicago, spring had passed without the glimpse of any garden but the geometric stars and crescents that were carved out in the lawns in Jackson Park. All the time she had been missing the helter-skelter growth out in her own back yard and hadn't sensed her hankering till now that she was home.

But as the days went by, she began to feel another sort of loss; the loss of what she'd had out West. For one thing she missed chance contacts and chance conversations with all sorts of people; with anyone whom she'd happened to sit next to at a Thomas Concert or at the theatre or at Hull House or on an elevated train or on one of the piers that fronted Lake Michigan. Here in Providence, any person whom she spoke to in the friendliest and most casual manner that she could assume, seemed to think he'd been accosted and quickly hurried off.

Then in Chicago, people loved to talk not of the past, but of the future. They liked nothing quite so much as wrangling over theories; theories of wealth and marriage and of education and of the individual's relation to society. They were always wondering what would happen if this or that experiment were tried out seriously. Sometimes they put their theories to proof and wanted everybody to stand by and watch. In Providence, the word "Socialist" was a word that it was wiser not to mention. Here they were "the great unwashed," while out West sometimes they were as rich as rich could be. Hadn't she met one who had actually tried to give away

a fortune and, failing that, had wished to share it? Especially there'd been one lady who had looked a little like the mother of the Gracchi and who for every child she bore herself, had adopted one to go with it and share with it. Nobody in Chicago had thought that she had lost her mind. They thought that she was brave and they applauded. They applauded each new stand and made a fearless act the thing to do. What's more, somebody was always doing one, so that even living on the edge, had been living on the edge of an exciting spectacle of life.

All that was gone. Nobody in Providence had quick, sudden, furious, new ideas they felt they had to spread. Providence had jogged along and done quite well the way it was. What more could any city ask than to have one family and then another who took on all its public needs and liked to be its benefactors? Suppose they assumed great power and lent the town a feudal touch? What of it? In return for all their benefactions, didn't they have the right to live in pomp and be baronial?

Meg had even heard her father say that he had a kind of sneaking liking for a man who gave a princely sum to science and believed at the same time that he could make the sun stand still. It was, he said, a straddle to admire.

And her mother would simply not admit that there was any cause for being bored. How could any girl be bored who'd just come home and hadn't even had a chance to catch up with her friends? "Why in no time at all, you won't even know you've been away," her mother kept on saying as though more than anything she wanted Meg to slip back into an old groove.

And in so many ways, Meg felt a new resistance. Some of the trouble was that she had grown used to her own privacy. She had been accustomed to the ownership of her own room until that ownership had come to mean a kind of decency. These days she longed to have herself all to herself and unobserved by any other person, and more than anything she hated to be managed and she was continually being managed. "Run upstairs and see your father." "Go sit with Grandmother." "Be sure to stop next door and call on Cousin Belle." She might want to of her own accord, but not when she was told to as though she were a little girl.

Even this year of idleness, this surprising year of idleness that

her mother meant to make a generous gift, seemed likely to be spoiled. For one thing, there was the consciousness of her mother's working just as hard while Meg herself was free. Then there was the superintendence and advice. She was to stop being quite so serious about the world and to try not taking life so seriously. She was to give up reading "heavy" books and working at a play that would never get her anywhere. Above all, she was to cease indulging in convictions and opinions that would scare off any man, and send him flying. "You need only listen to men," Mother said. "I've done it all my life. It only takes a little self-control."

For this winter—and who knew what might occur?—Meg was to have her swing like any other girl in Providence. A real "coming out" with a big formal tea was something not quite manageable in the house on Cushing Street. But they could be "at home" on Sunday afternoons. "At home" to whom? Meg wondered when she was so out of touch. But she knew that her mother saw a stream of eager callers who would be glad to gather round the tea table and use the brand new, plated silver service that had come from Tilden Thurber's and had been initialed properly, and that had cost so much to acquire.

It was now standing all assembled on the sideboard, and Meg hated it. Other tea sets that they had were very old and they were lovely with pink lustre. Were they too good to use? she'd asked. But it seemed that when a young girl poured tea for young men, she had to pour from silver. "Even when it's plated?" Meg had asked. And at once she'd known her words had been a stab. Hadn't her mother tried so hard to have things right? Hadn't she spent more than she could afford and made a present that she had thought would lend assurance? Then to make returns with such a statement. Wouldn't a daughter have to go to almost any lengths to heal that wound? And it might always leave a little scar.

What Meg could not make out was that her father seemed to think he understood exactly how her mother felt.

"She wants to give you what she missed herself," he'd said. "Maybe this year, instead, is going to be your gift to her. If it is, you can afford to spare one winter from your youth and make your gift a lavish one. Splurge a bit for her. Make all the splash you can. It won't be all dead loss. You can't meet even deadly bores without some profit if you take a scientific interest in them. I'd

keep an eye out for a young Polonius and try to find the perfect specimen of someone who even in his tender years can only say 'Buz-buz.'"

That was the very best that he could do for her. But he did recognize the fact that she was different. When it came to the old favorite novels that he liked to read aloud to her, she couldn't trick him with dishonesty.

"Daddy," and Meg had mustered up her courage for one question. "Don't you truly think *Pendennis* is a little shallow and old-fashioned?"

Very quietly he had closed the worn brown copy and had returned it to its place on the high book shelf.

"We won't insult the feelings of 'Old Pen,'" he'd said. "He relishes contempt of the right sort. He's used to being set down as a snob, but he isn't used to seeming wishy-washy. Let's let him keep his pride and put him by."

Meg couldn't share with him the books that she was racing through and it was wiser to seek out the Athenaeum and the little filing room down in the basement. It had a stale and vaultlike chill and green ivy tendrils trailed across the barred and prisonlike windows and the light was dim, but she could sit there undisturbed.

Suppose she tried to read at home.

Grandmother Simmons sought her out. "Forever hunching up your shoulders," she'd remark. "Forever trying to make something out of nothing." Grandmother wanted someone who would let her talk about the people she had known; people who had lived without the least conception of a modern social problem and who'd been dead for years and years.

The quietest companion, Meg discovered, was her grandfather. At his window, close to where the ruffled curtains parted, he sat and added little sums in his account book or sometimes he'd say aloud a sentence from his Bible as though he liked the spoken feeling of the words.

But his presence seemed like a reproof. It could turn poring over *Damaged Goods* into a kind of profanation. Why, the only kind of damaged goods he'd ever heard of must have been not people but those textiles that had sometimes happened in his mills.

His silent, distant company even brought a kind of shame-

fulness to turning any page of Zola's. It made *Fecundité* seem coarse, not great. It turned *Nana* into something soiled and ugly and not the careful, fearless, and outspoken study of a courtesan. It did something to the plays of Sudermann so that the reckless joy of living that they preached seemed much too sultry and too pagan when Meg could glance up and see his sad, old gentle face and know that for him Jerusalem was golden and that its waters did flow through the streets with a cool silvery sound.

Her father was quite different. At least he ought to be. If she couldn't talk to him of social evils and the new prevention of their spread, what had become of all the breadth and tolerance that he stood for? Was he open-minded only when it came to new discoveries in science? Couldn't he see that attitudes towards conduct had to change?

Apparently he couldn't; for when Meg had tried him out on Sudermann he'd called it "pretty steep" and "rather rocky going" for a man of his age.

"But Lili believed in love," Meg had explained. "Even in the lowest gutters she kept searching for it."

Yet her father said that the point was that a stupid little prostitute would search in gutters because she liked them better than the sidewalk and that what she truly loved was paddling in the drainage. No, what he preferred was a prostitute with the wits of Becky Sharp that took her into drawing rooms and let her go to ruin with a great Lord Steyne.

He let Meg know that there were subjects that it was wiser not to try to share and that left her only Grandmother to talk to. Just once Meg had tried to tell her of the modern attitude towards marriage; an attitude that would have changed her life and set her free of all the Simmonses. But Grandmother had gone to her top bureau drawer and taken out her spectacles; and after she had curled the bows around her ears, she had come close and peered at Meg.

"Women who march themselves up to the verge," she'd said, "go over. What's more, nobody's going to waste a mite of time in looking where they've spilled to."

After that, Meg had realized that it was wiser to sit quietly and listen to the same old stories. Besides, more and more frequently

there came the days when Grandmother was cloudy in her mind and started off in search of those bright little bits of memory that seemed to lie about the house in any room but hers.

After dinner, there were hours when Meg knew her mother took time from her work and gave up a whole evening, purposely. But they were never by themselves, and not intimately ever. Her mother's tribal pride sprang up and off they went to call on someone in the Simmons family. And it was not as though the family had more than the slightest interest in a younger member. Otherwise Meg wouldn't know so well the outlines of the dark and leafy porches where great-aunts and cousins sat and rocked till ten o'clock.

She had come to understand why no Simmons owned a book until her mother had owned *Gems from Tennyson*. Who else had such zest for the affairs of living people? They were busy catching up on the latest news about each other and no scrap of gossip was too small for them. They were deep in at least a dozen actual serials at once and they kept on adding chapter after chapter to each one.

Meg had come home to stay in Providence and that was all there was to say about her for the present. Only Cousin Cora had focused her attention on her. "Meg doesn't marry, does she?" she'd announced, as though a girl should form the habit and go to the altar every day as regularly as she combed her hair or brushed her teeth.

Marriage was in the air just like the smell of linden blossoms, and, like the smell of lindens, it was sticky sweet.

Almost all the girls whom Meg had grown up with were engaged. When she went to see them, they didn't want to talk of books or anything she knew about. Inevitably they were working their initials on tea cloths and napkins and on towels and on pillow cases. With each other they discussed napery and flat silver and their trousseaux and their wedding gowns and the proper length for veils and trains. "I'm sick to death of rainbow weddings," Gertrude had announced. "I'm going to cling to green and have my wedding strictly Alpha Delt."

Now was Mildred Jastrum's chance to have her own initials put on everything. Meg had run across her in the millinery room

at Gladdings and at once Mildred had held out a left hand that had fingernails like little polished shells. It had also been adorned with three square diamonds, of which the owner was so proud that the very first thing that she'd called in greeting had been: "I'm going to live in Jersey and he's rich."

At least she knew the motive that she had in marrying. Most of the others didn't seem to. They got arch and bent their heads and said it didn't seem quite fair to any man to keep him dangling any longer. Or they said that they'd simply drifted into an engagement and that no one was ever more surprised. Then when they talked about the actual moment of their yielding, they made the setting seem tremendously important. More often than was possible there had been a moon. There had been the drifting fragrance of some special flower; and apparently a proposal was induced by sitting in a nook.

One thing Meg knew. If she ever got engaged, it wouldn't be to any man who'd drifted or who'd dangled or who had been humiliated by her first. And she wouldn't let him ask her when the moon was shining or when the air was drugged with perfume or anywhere but in the open. Suppose it could be Gid? He'd ask her right on Market Square and be unconscious of the passers-by. Or he'd ask her on a beach or in a pasture, or anywhere where he could walk while he spoke of a decision that would be momentous to them both. But the very last place in the world where he would be induced to other than wanting to feel free and unrestricted, would be a nook.

All the same, there were things that Meg did wish she understood. How did a girl know she was in love? The surest way to tell would seem to be not minding someone's actual closeness. Things had happened long ago; things that Meg couldn't make out very clearly. There was her dread of having anyone, no matter who it was, "cooped up" with her. That dread went way back to the time when she had been a little girl who had been nursed through scarlet fever. No one whom she loved was going to have to stay shut in with her again. There was her own fear of intimately sharing the same room and promising to want to share it all her life. There was her horror of the rosewood bed in which her grandmother and grandfather had slept beside each other

with unhappiness between them. There was her mother's bed, in which Meg herself had had to sleep as far back as she could remember, so that her father had to stay away, and other children shouldn't happen.

Remembrances could make all that Ibsen had to say on marriage seem so silly. Girls might be as sincere and candid as they liked and talk over everything beforehand with an utter naked frankness. They could follow much more modern writers and discuss inheritance and settle on the number and the spacing of their children long before the ceremony. They could believe that they were entering upon an honest social contract like a business partnership. And what would it amount to? Nothing, if they felt the slightest shudder at each other's nearness.

In all her life whom had she ever wanted to be near? Only Gid, who kept away because they knew too much. Why did they think they had to heed that knowledge? Others didn't. Others with quite as much to fear, plunged ahead and risked the consequences. Maybe they were right.

CHAPTER XLI

"Little ladies do not ride on ice carts.

That remark of Cousin Belle's had been for years a family by-word. Even though Meg had been through college and was now a Graduate Student too, her mother still liked to say it to her laughingly, giving the words a mock solemnity that poked fun at a world of manners which was quite outside the simple world in which they lived.

What her mother didn't seem to understand was that the words had established a relationship. Somewhere still in her, Meg was conscious of the little girl who had been sucking at a cold, hard chunk of ice tied in her handkerchief and who had been jogging pleasantly along on the back of a huge, dripping wagon. A window had been raised. A voice had called reprovingly; and she had looked up to see the haughty face of Cousin Belle surveying her in disapproval from the second story of a big Colonial-yellow

house. In her mind, that was the way that Meg saw Cousin Belle even now. And she felt rebellious as she put on her light brown pongee suit and took out a pair of clean white gloves before she went next door to be taken on a round of formal calls.

"You mustn't look so glum," her mother said as she laid aside her work to talk. "Luckily your Cousin Belle is an authority on every kind of ice cart. I'm glad she's fond enough of you to keep you off of them. She loves having you in charge and telling you exactly how a little lady should behave."

That was true. "And now, dear Meg," Cousin Belle would start. Then in a voice too modulated and controlled, she would begin a little talk on etiquette. And what earthly right had she to be the one who was instructing?

"Mother," Meg began. "I don't belong to Cousin Belle. I'm not even any blood relation to her. And I don't like feeling so adopted."

"Adopted?" Her mother smiled as though no one could be asked to take the protest seriously. "Sometimes," she said, "you get the queerest notions."

"It isn't a queer notion," Meg protested stubbornly as she stared down at her shiny patent leather shoes. "Why do I have to be dragged round and made to call on rich old ladies? I'm sick to death of porte-cocheres and dusky drawing rooms. I simply hate the talk of 'little' tradespeople; my 'little' grocer and my 'little fishman' and my 'little milliner.' The other day I nearly came right out and said, 'I got this hat from my "huge" milliner.'"

"Meaning me?" Her mother smiled approvingly as though what mattered was the hat that she had trimmed and not the protests.

Maybe the only way to reach her was by turning personal.

"When I'm introduced, nobody mentions you at all," Meg said. "'This is Whit Bailey's Meg.'" She was mimicking the voice of Cousin Belle.

But instead of minding, her mother only laughed.

"Then you're not presented as an orphan," she was saying. "You're presented as your father's daughter and it ought to make you very proud."

"Not when it doesn't mean my father as I know him. It only

means that once upon a time he had the right connections. Besides, that sort of introduction leaves me half an orphan, doesn't it?" Meg pleaded. "Can't I ever be your child?"

Her mother's face had altered suddenly. It lost the look of the old Senator whom more and more she did resemble as her features grew more finely edged. For the moment, her clear blue eyes had softened with affection and there were gentle curving lines about her mouth.

"You're my little Sobersides," she said. "You always have been. But, Darling, when have I ever had the time for the sort of world your Cousin Belle's at home in?"

"Even if you had the time," Meg urged, "I don't believe that you could stand it. I mean being proper and conventional and so dull. You've never cared a scrap what anybody thought."

"I've never cared enough what anybody thought," her mother said. "The trouble is I've never had to. Almost all my life I've had your father back of me. I don't know another man who would have let his wife go racketing around and had such trust in her. And, Darling," she was adding in a different voice, "I don't want to think you'll have to racket."

"But I want to," Meg put in. "That's exactly what I'm fitted for, not stupid, stuffy drawing rooms. If you meant to have me be a little lady why did you send me to Bryn Mawr? And why ever did you send me to Chicago University? I'm glad I went to both. But I don't see why you thought that what I learned would do a thing for me in Providence."

At her words, she saw her mother's face grow wistful.

"I did my level best," her mother said. "I was providing for your future. I thought you'd have to start right off to earn your living. How could I know that with your father's pension and my textbooks, I could afford to give you one free year? And I do so want to have it be the kind of year I never had; filled up with silly parties and young men, especially young men."

But what Meg wanted was to learn to write and to be a reader in a New York publishing house and to live somewhere in an attic studio and to have experiences and see life. And here was her mother longing for her to be popular when she couldn't be, when she'd been trained not to be, if anything. Besides,

"All of Cousin Belle's best friends are old," Meg said, "and widows. Their butlers and their footmen are the only men they've seen for years and years."

Her mother didn't think that mattered.

"Widows with their butlers and their footmen can help you get established." She spoke the word "established" with a firmness that showed it was a word to which she wasn't used.

"And you look very nice." She glanced at Meg appraisingly. "You'll be a credit to your Cousin Belle. It's time you ran along and joined her. At least I know enough to know that little ladies can't be late."

Always Meg had to wait in Cousin Belle's dim living room and always it made her think about Napoleon and the enrichments he had carried into exile. Surely his crested silver water pitcher and its basin could have been no more out of place on Elba than the ormolu clock up on the mantelpiece where time was told by a little dangling snake that made a pendulum and had a winking emerald for an eye. On the carved oak table was a casket made of malachite that might once have held crown jewels. The huge dragon-headed chair where Cousin Charlie sat night after night and went to sleep behind the stiff white shield of his boiled shirt, belonged in a vast Tudor hall, not here. And whether it was a footstool covered with the finest needlepoint or a shell that held a silvery pink pearl left wastefully in its own matrix, all about the room there were reminders of those regal days before Cousin Belle had felt herself betrayed by life.

That betrayal she was bearing proudly as she came in dressed in a navy blue foulard with a stiff boned collar that was like a little picket fence spread tautly with old lace. Her toque of violets was curved up at the back and in the front, it condescended with the condescending oval of her face. It was a toque shaped for acknowledgments, not friendly greeting. Around her neck, clasped loosely to one side, was a mink boa, whose soft brown tails kept getting mixed up in the jewelled chain of her lorgnette.

At any rate this afternoon, her mood was one of critical approval. As Meg stood still and waited judgment, she learned that her pongee suit was in good taste. So was her hat of black maline, once a crisp face veil had been added to it. Now that they

were starting out, she was gazing at a fresh green world through a dark mesh.

But at least it didn't stop her from watching Cousin Belle descending her steep granite steps. However did she manage that air of faint surprise at not finding her own carriage waiting? It was years since she had had one. Yet for the flicker of an instant she seemed to be expecting it. And now her acting was still better. Meg—even Meg who knew—was to think that Cousin Belle was irritated with herself and not her coachman. Anyone might think that she had forgotten for a moment that she'd told him that she wouldn't need his services and much preferred to walk.

But not too fast. This was the proper slow and idling pace as though a real objective was something sought for only by a rather common person. There wasn't any use, Meg knew, in feeling restive. She had to play her role and to pretend that they had set forth to take the air and glance at gardens. They must really seize the opportunity to glance at gardens since they chanced to be on foot.

"Dear Mrs. Harkness is so hurt," said Cousin Belle, "unless I stop to see her rhododendrons. We must stroll that way and take a little peek at them."

No one could peek, not at this blare of bloom that was bursting through the grillwork. Great ruffled flowers of every violent shade of red and purple and magenta made Meg want to look away from them or close her eyes.

Cool and lovely in comparison seemed "dear" Mrs. Shepard's garden. From a gently sloping lawn, great boles of trees soared up and parted high among the drooping branches that mottled the smooth stretch of grass beneath the shifting shade.

And it seemed—so Cousin Belle was saying—that as soon as Mrs. Shepard left to spend the summer at her place at Potowomat she wished Meg to feel that she might come inside the gate and bring a book and read or wander in the garden. Or better yet, if she was very careful how she used the privilege, she might occasionally pick a nosegay.

"Lemon verbena and a sprig or two of heliotrope and a leaf of sweet geranium. I rather think I wouldn't touch the roses," said

the voice of Cousin Belle. "Mrs. Shepard is a person of great sentiment. Since her husband's death ten years ago, she lets no one touch his favorite jaqueminots. Even when she is away, she wishes them to bloom and wither on their stems."

There was something sympathetic that Meg felt she ought to say, but what it was she didn't know. Nor did it matter, for Cousin Belle had turned to someone else.

"Dear Mr. Charlie Hammond," she was saying. "One associates him . . ."

"Associates him, Cousin Belle?"

"Yes, with white roses always. In all his years of marriage, he has never failed in such a charming courtesy. By Mrs. Hammond's breakfast plate, every morning, she has found one pure white rose."

"How awful," Meg had almost said out loud; then she had changed it quickly to "How beautiful."

But it was awful, really. Who would want to go on seeming pure forever and forever? She wouldn't anyhow. If every single morning, she had to come downstairs to find a flower beside her breakfast plate, she'd like it to be passionately crimson. Or wild at least. Or something unexpected. Queer, how suddenly it seemed the sort of game she might have played with Gid.

If it could only be their game, she would get surprises certainly. There would be times when she would be presented with a bunch of roadside flowers to show that she needn't think that she could be too airy with him. And there would be other times when she would get the rarest things that he could lay his hands on, a little yellow lady slipper or a meadow orchid or a fringed gentian in its season. Nor was there any use in not admitting that there would be weeks and weeks when Gid wouldn't give her anything at all. Mostly that would be because he knew he didn't have to, but once in a rare while he'd show her that he meant to hurt. However, that would be exciting. There would be times when she would have to reckon with his moods. But at any rate she wouldn't have to reckon with the kind of life that went with one pure white rose laid by a breakfast plate on every single morning in the year.

Faintly Meg knew that Cousin Belle was making comments and had murmured an assent to the inflection, not the words. Now, however, they were pausing by a wrought-iron gate let into a

brick wall. Behind the wall was the dark spread of copper beeches that were twins of exactly the same height and spread and that cut off the lower half of a big, looming, red-brick house, topped by a white balustrade.

The broad slate walk was no different from a dozen others up which Meg had walked recently in bored and slow attendance. She had taken out her calling card and rung the bell. Now for the inevitable solemn butler and what she knew that she would find behind that kind of massive door.

Sure enough. In the dark, spacious hall, there was the usual console table with its marble top and with its alabaster bowl around the rim of which were Pliny's doves blind to the gold eagle perched on the usual gold mirror just above their heads.

And once she and Cousin Belle were shown into the drawing room, it, too, seemed conventional at first. The soaring walls were papered with a crimson satin pattern that matched the crimson velvet hangings of the curtains and the damask of the chairs and sofas. And like every other, the closed top of the big, black Steinway had become a harp-shaped stand for photographs that hid each other with the borders of wide, silver ornamental frames.

But it wasn't her imagination. Everywhere she looked were nooks. There was one in each bay window; a comfortable one, set with two chairs and with a little table. On one table was a small bezique case and on the other there were ivory chessmen left in action with no settlement of their dispute. Way, way off there was a Turkish nook that was a separate room set off by draperies. Below a scarf pierced through with a long shining scimitar was a low divan strewn with pillows, each stood up on its corner and glistening with little chips of silver. Deeper and darker and more intimate was the furthest nook of all. There could a couple sit in dimness and gaze through the parted portieres at the blurred outlines of tall plants and palms where the conservatory lay behind a misty door. And of a sudden Meg knew that she was staring at a nook that held a lady's little slant-topped desk. An *escritoire*. Wasn't that what Cousin Belle would call it? Not that that mattered. What mattered was that on it was a single silver vase that held one pure white rose.

So then Cousin Belle was up to one of her *manœuvres*. No doubt all the time she had known that she was coming here be-

cause in some vague way it would be advantageous for a girl who had to get "established" and very deviously she had prepared the way for the kind of hostess who might be important in this silly social life.

Automatically, Meg was rising as there was a rustling presence in the room and the first exchange of greetings.

Cousin Belle was looking like Queen Alexandra and being very gracious as she went through the formalities. Now came the moment when Meg had to be her maid-in-waiting and seem very grateful for the privilege. Yet each time it seemed like a betrayal of the life on Cushing Street and of everything for which it stood.

"This is Whit Bailey's Meg," Cousin Belle was saying as Meg was presented and was going through with her set lines.

Her hand was in a hand that seemed to have no bones and she was glancing at a lady who was fairer than her mother. Or was it that this lady lacked a glint and sparkle? Her very faintly yellow hair had lost its sheen and there was a baby roundness to her little features and a milky blueness to her eyes. She was a lady who had been fed on charming courtesies. It was easy to see that.

And protected by a man. One had come into the drawing room behind her, carrying her scarf and being reverential to all womanhood as he stood in attendance and waited to be drawn into the group.

Cousin Belle was giving him the smile she gave to special favorites and she was saying, "So there are pauses in the world of finance? Or do you close the door on it and steal away?"

He had only time to give a noncommittal word before Mrs. Hammond slipped her arm in his possessively.

"Dear Meg—for I must call your father's daughter Meg," she said. "This is my boy. This is my Harold. While we old people have our bit of gossip, you young people . . ."

There was a stir, a shift of chairs. Then before she knew it, Meg was sitting in a nook. A man had put a pillow at her back and was so near her on the sofa that she was looking at the soft white hands he clasped around one knee. Somehow, she had been used to thinking that a man's hands were darker than her own and strong with bones.

Harold Hammond had his mother's kind of fairness, but it was

intensified by his bald forehead that was edged with soft, pale hair that bore down upon his small plump features and that took away their character. Except that there was a hint of stubbornness about his mouth.

"Professor Bailey's daughter," he was saying. "The daughter of the Sage of Providence."

"I don't believe," Meg said, "that he would like to have me think of him that way. He would hate to have me venerate him. He'd much rather that I thought that he was fun."

Mr. Hammond didn't seem to hear her.

"In our household," he continued, "we regard Professor Bailey as our local seer. We read his charming little essays in the *Sunday Journal*. It is our only way to keep in touch with Nature. But he shares her secrets with us. When he knows a bank where the wild thyme is growing, he may be counted on to tell us."

But wild thyme didn't grow in the United States, nor did amaryllis, nor any of the other plants that Meg heard Mr. Hammond mentioning. And if they did, her father would be sure to guard their whereabouts.

"He only writes about the common roadside plants," she said. "He never dares to mention any of the shy ones."

"Shy!" Mr. Hammond liked the word so well that he repeated it. He was saying that he thought it was a word too seldom heard these days; a word that came becomingly from the lips of a young girl. Moreover, it was one that added to the picture of a botanist dwelling in a magic kingdom of his own and revealing it to no one but his daughter.

"Miranda tutored by Prince Ferdinand," said Mr. Hammond.

"It's not a bit like that," Meg argued. "It isn't, really. My father never tutors me. He's never scientific with me unless I ask him questions. He's afraid that if he were, he'd spoil our walks."

Her protests didn't matter in the least.

"Miranda. Miranda in the meadows, culling wild flowers," her companion kept insisting.

"But I don't cull," she cried. "My father's taught me not to. He says that women who can't keep their hands off wild flowers ought to have a special jail built for them. They're the very ones, he says, who've caused some plants to be extinct."

"But guided by your father's lore, you would be gathering herbs for making potions."

Whichever way she turned and no matter what she said, she still remained Miranda in the meadows. Suddenly her eye fell on the little desk and the small vase that contained the morning votive offering.

"The only white roses that I've ever had," she started off, "came from the greenhouse in the Swan Point Cemetery. My father used to take me out there when I was a little girl and I got the flowers left over from the wreaths. They had wires in their stems, but I thought that they were simply beautiful. If I liked them, wires and all, that ought to make you know that I'm not the least bit like Miranda."

"A Prospero will bring them freshly cut," Mr. Hammond was assuring her.

If Cousin Belle would only rise and start to leave.

At last she was beginning her departure and Meg was uttering the proper things that were expected of her. But it took a long, long time to say how much she did appreciate this little visit and what a pleasure it had been to meet an old friend of her father's and to be seen out the door by Mr. Harold Hammond, who helped Cousin Belle down the front steps before he turned and said good-bye.

Meg was Miranda to the very end. He spoke the word to her in a low voice as she left him standing at the gate.

Then she and Cousin Belle were idling up the street at a slow, rambling pace. But once they had turned the corner, Meg was aware of a voice that had grown confidential.

"You made a very nice impression," Cousin Belle was saying. "Harold Hammond asked me if I thought that he might call on you."

"He can't call on me," Meg said. "Our house is simply jammed with people. There's Grandmother. There's Grandfather . . ."

"I invited him to take a cup of tea with me next Sunday. I told him that you always poured for me," said the firm, imperious voice of Cousin Belle.

CHAPTER XLII

It was all the worse to sleep in the same bed and share the same room when Meg felt that she had lost her mother. Somewhere there must be the person who had planned and worked so hard to have her daughter go to college and to Chicago University. But these days Meg felt that she was dealing with a stranger who wanted to be proud of her in a new way.

"You're the queerest girl I ever knew," her mother said. "I should think you would be grateful for attention. A white rose every single day. Why, even when I was engaged your father never did that for me."

"No," Meg said, "he wouldn't. I can't imagine Father's stressing purity."

"Stressing purity. I don't believe," her mother said, "that Harold Hammond's ever mentioned it."

"He doesn't have to, does he, when he surrounds me with it?"

"Surrounds you?" her mother laughed. "One white rose can't surround you."

"But it does. It's always just arriving at the breakfast table. Or it's being thrown away at night because it's wilted. And in between times, it's standing on our bureau looking silly. Now that he's sent a silver vase to go with it, it looks still sillier. I hate it even worse."

Again Meg had made her mother lose her patience. Mother liked Harold Hammond. She couldn't think of anyone who accepted the whole family so simply and so unobtrusively. "The thoughtful courteous little things that he thinks up for each of us," she added as a last remark.

That was true, unluckily.

Wasn't it years since Grandma Simmons had admitted that she'd seen a blackheart cherry? Yet yesterday, she'd had a bowl of them, so plump and dark and juicy that she had thought she knew the very tree that they'd been picked from at the Simmons Homestead. "You had to lean your ladder clean across the upper chamber window, didn't you?" she had asked Harold Hammond knowingly.

The fruit had come from an expensive grocery down on Market Square!

Moreover, he had discovered that she had a crowlike love for small, bright things; a thimble or a case of shiny needles or a little pair of scissors that she could pounce on eagerly and hide away.

Grandpa at first had been bewildered by attention. "I thank you very kindly, Sir," he'd said and put his presents by. But now that he had learned to use his magnifying glass, he held it to the fine print in his Bible and brought it slowly down the page, hour after hour.

If Meg went upstairs to her father's study, it had ceased to be a refuge. The cigars he smoked smelled differently; and on his table were the expensive periodicals he'd hankered for for years; *Punch* and the *Spectator* and *English Country Life*.

And Mother was the one most favored.

It was almost like the days when men had come to call on her. She was continually getting a big box of Huyler's, but sometimes she unfolded tissue paper and drew out a Liberty scarf with crinkled colors running through its silken texture or a pair of pearl gray gloves or some appropriate gift. Once an enormous plant had come in a white wicker cradle with a handle. It had been addressed to her, but the card had read, "To the blossom and bud lily"; and Meg had felt strangely sick.

Her mother had been considering Meg's ingratitude.

"Harold brings you books," she said. "At least they ought to please you. You're forever reading everything that you can get your hands on."

"Not everything." Meg could feel her stubbornness encase her like firm armor. "Do I look as though I were the kind of girl who would read Maeterlinck's *The Bee*?"

"Why not? Aren't you the daughter of a naturalist?" her mother asked. "Why shouldn't Harold think you would enjoy it?"

"He wasn't thinking about my enjoyment," Meg insisted. "I don't believe he knows it, but he was thinking of the queen bee's virgin flight."

Her mother, who used to be such fun, was shocked. She had never met a man less coarse and more fastidious and she was sure no evil thought had crossed his mind.

"If it would only cross his mind," Meg cried. "But it keeps zig-zagging back and forth and hovering. That's exactly what it does."

"I shouldn't think he'd want to take you anywhere." Her mother was firmly on his side. "You must ruin everything he takes you to."

"I do," Meg said, "but not always purposely."

There was the open-air concert that she'd been to out at Roger Williams Park. She had enjoyed the music rapturously and uncritically to the very end. Then as the conductor had bowed for the last time, Harold had made his summary of the whole performance. "What a pity that the bassoons got quite so out of hand," he'd said; and Meg had laughed out loud. "What's so funny about that?" he'd asked. "Everything," she'd said. "I never heard of a bassoon except in *The Ancient Mariner*. I think of it as a dead instrument, like the psalter in the Bible. I'm glad it's still got spunk enough to get so out of hand." That remark had ruined Harold's pleasure, except that he was going to start with very simple rudimentary lessons and prepare her for the Boston Symphony before it came to Providence next fall.

"We spoil things for each other," she was saying. Her thoughts had shifted to a play called *When We Were Twenty-One*. Harold had taken her because he thought the title so appropriate and charming; and what a silly goose he'd made her feel.

"Mother," she begged. "Suppose that you'd been made to rise and leave the theatre in the middle of an act? Suppose you'd had to show that you were shocked because your ears were sullied by the one word 'mistress'? I'm used to mistresses."

"Used to mistresses?" By a turn of voice her mother could make remarks sound very strange.

"Well, I am," Meg said. "Rich men have them here in Providence and everybody knows. It's only that they're talked about in whispers. But at Chicago University they were forever turning up in books and we discussed them openly in a mixed class. We talked about them frankly."

"I wish I'd never let you go out West," her mother said in a regretful voice.

"It isn't just the West," Meg said. "It's Bryn Mawr too. You should have seen Harold when I told him I believed in Woman's Suffrage and that the indirect influence was something that I didn't

take much stock in. Then he veered and insisted that I'd just be doubling some man's vote. It was then that I came right out and said I'd vote for Debs. But since he'd never heard of Debs, I had to change and say that I might vote for a good Democrat. Harold has an upper lip that trembles when he's very angry. It trembles most when he discusses Labor."

"Then don't discuss it," her mother interrupted. "Labor's not important to you, is it?"

"I don't know enough to have it be important," Meg confessed. "I'm not Carola. I don't want to give my life to it. But I can't bear the words that Harold uses when he speaks of it. He wants to grind it down and lash it back. Then when I ask him how he could use Labor in his mills when he'd done all he wanted to it, he says I'm talking like a woman. 'We will go back to your realm.' I'm forever being put back in my realm."

There wasn't any use in saying any more. It was wiser to go out of doors and get away; but while she changed her dress, Meg felt her mother's eyes survey her critically.

"I used to think I'd be so glad," her mother said, "when you reached the point of making your own dresses. But do you have to choose such gaudy colors? That bright pink stripe. A Portuguese would love it."

"I love it too." Purposely Meg had departed from pale tints and had trimmed a hat with peonies, full and open and ranging from deep flaunting rose to red.

Now that she was putting the gay straw on her head and giving it a tilt, she stood looking at her own reflection in the mirror. No, the Hammond family would not approve of her. Very delicately, Mrs. Hammond would make a substitution and present her with a French concoction of her own and would say that it was far too young for an old lady like herself and much more suited to pink cheeks. "Kindness personified." That, Meg knew, was the name her mother had for Mrs. Hammond; but what about that lady's saying that all Meg needed was "a little guidance"? The first time Meg had been a guest in the big formal red-brick house, her hostess hadn't guided her in time and she had failed to put her hand across the little sherry glass and had let the butler fill it and had seen a look of shocked surprise. Well, it had not been greater than her own.

"I don't suppose it matters what you wear if you're only going to the Athenaeum." That was her mother's comment. Then she added, "But while you're out, there's an errand you might run for me."

Meg felt that she would run a dozen errands to escape from Harold Hammond and from talking any more about him. If she hid herself in a dark alcove, then he mightn't find her. But he would be sure to stop and search on his way back from his office as he came up College Hill.

"If you hurry," her mother's voice was going on, "you'll just have time to catch Dr. Bogert in his office. Tell him I don't really need him for a house call. What I want is Grandmother's prescription. She doesn't sleep without her codeine and each time he has to fill a blank and sign his name."

It seemed that Meg no longer had to go down to the old brick building in the slums. Dr. Bogert had moved his office into the big corner house that he had bought on Brooke Street. By doing that, he'd got rid of his father's class of patients; the race-track touts and jockeys and the "dubious looking" women who would never dream of coming up the hill where they weren't wanted.

"Now that Dr. Bogert's come into his fortune," Meg heard her mother say, "I daresay that he'll be giving up his practice. He's never cared for medicine, not the way his father did. He'd far rather be out playing golf and whisking round the links."

Meg didn't need to be told that. Now that she had left the house and was walking down the streets that were already dark with summer shade, she was seeing in her mind a picture that was glaring with bright open sunlight. Time and again in the late afternoon, hadn't she had tea with Harold Hammond at the Hunt Club and from the place he chose, his favorite sheltered nook, hadn't she gazed off across the golf links?

There was a lane of shorn, smooth grass between low, blowing meadows that Harold called "a fairway," which seemed exactly the right name. But the tiny shallow ponds and gentle little rills—it did seem absurd to call them "hazards." And wandering through the loveliest spots of all, through tangles of sweet fern and bayberry was being "in the rough."

At any rate not far from where she and Harold sat and had iced tea, was the ninth hole; and there a pair of men would often

stand for quite a while. They had their visored caps pulled down and they kept glancing sidewise while they measured distance with their eyes. They were as serious as little boys and their hands fiddled with their sticks until they mustered up enormous courage for a gentle stroke. Finally a white ball disappeared and a couple came in, making for the locker room. They had to pass the corner where she was, and their hot, brown, glistening arms and necks and faces made Harold Hammond look more pale.

One of them was sure to be "young" Dr. Bogert, and Harold hated him as much as he detested Democrats and Labor. He didn't want to have her bow to him.

"But he's our family doctor," she'd insisted.

That wasn't right. It wasn't right at all. Young girls consulted elderly physicians and certainly not bachelors.

It hadn't helped when she'd told Harold that there was no one she consulted, that she wasn't ever sick. Never to be sick was not quite feminine. Meg had learned that.

And there was something else she'd learned. When Dr. Bogert bowed to her, his steel gray eyes made fun of her. Why on earth, he seemed to say, should she be sitting in a honeysuckle corner with someone quite so unmasculine and unattractive? What had happened to the girl who had dived off cliffs at Little Compton and who had dared to swim bare-legged? He made his smile a knowing kind of taunt.

Meg didn't want to go into his office now she'd reached it. She had dawdled up the concrete path between two rows of bush-hydrangeas and had thought them simply hideous, but no more so than this long side-porch with its overhanging fretwork that was picked out in mustard yellow from deep brown. And how could anyone endure possession of this sombre, ugly waiting room with its glossy woodwork of black walnut and its huge black walnut center table and its walnut side chairs covered with stiff leather of a lustreless maroon?

She would like to get right up and run away from this encounter. But if there was one place in the world where Harold wouldn't dream of finding her, it was here all by herself, unchaperoned, about to have a word with someone whom he didn't even like to have her bow to. That was an exciting thought.

It must be late for office hours since she was the only person left, but at last a massive door was swinging open and a bent, old gentleman was leaving and going past her with slow, shuffling steps.

"Come in," said the voice of Dr. Bogert. It was deep and vibrant and it made Meg think of the bassoon that could get so out of hand.

Very formally he had ushered her inside and she was sitting in a ponderous chair beside a still more ponderous desk that was set with silver articles that were too elaborately embossed. And because she didn't want to be embarrassed, she was taking in the room and its high salmon-colored walls. What an extraordinary color for a doctor's office, but no more extraordinary than the high screen that shielded half of an examining table. It had a dark design done in burnt wood in heavy gouges and at the top, there was a painted frieze of cupids who were rollicking in a dark grotto. It wasn't just the Hammonds whom it would offend. "There's such a thing," Meg could hear her mother stating firmly, "there is such a thing as taste."

She had kept her eyes askance while she'd explained what she had come for. "I'm sorry I'm so late," she added. "I don't want to keep you from your golf game."

"My golf game," Dr. Bogert said, "can wait."

Across the desk reached a dark serge sleeve and below the nearest, finest razor-edge of a white cuff, a hand was scrawling something on a writing tablet marked with a black R. The hand was firm and brown. It was a little spread and thickened at the knuckles and it showed strong bones.

It belonged to someone who reminded her, as she glanced up, of a stage character. Not a cold and wintry Ibsen hero. Not Rosmer, the idealist. She was thinking of The Gay Lord Quex, whom in college days she had thought simply fascinating. But surely she didn't still like looks that were so bold and masculine and so assured of conquests. If she did, it was because she was so tired of Harold Hammond's stubborn plumpness that couldn't make her do or say or think a thing she didn't wish to. Why did Harold Hammond stand her nonsense and come back for more of it? Dr. Bogert wouldn't. She could imagine how his mouth and

jutting chin would clamp tight on an argument and snap it off without any more to-do.

Only now that he had turned her way, she wasn't used to being stared at—not like this—so that she was conscious of the fit of her new dress and everything.

"How do the Hammonds like that hat?" Dr. Bogert asked abruptly.

"They don't," she said. "At least they wouldn't if they saw it."

Then she felt a wild new daring that she couldn't seem to help. She was sick to death of trying hard to be "a little lady." She wanted to strike fire and see what happened.

"The only kind of pink the Hammonds like to have me wear," she said, "is 'blush'."

He laughed right out. All the same he understood. She wouldn't have to add a single word to make him understand the kind of horridness that there could be in forever dwelling upon modesty and daintiness. She could even talk to him quite easily about "the woman's realm" in which she was supposed to dwell.

The strange thing was that he should understand what her own mother didn't.

"You don't belong among the blushers," he was saying. "Anyone with half an eye would be aware of that. I expect if anyone was honest with you, you could stand anything he faced you with."

"I could," she said.

"All right," he said. "I'll take a chance and steam ahead."

At once his whole attitude had changed and he was dealing with her simply and directly. Maybe coarsely too. If he was being coarse, she didn't care. At least he wasn't muffling up his meanings. They came out plain and blunt.

"The Hammonds aren't your sort," he said. "You'd be much safer West among the bison and the Mormon elders."

Oddly enough Meg found that she was using all her mother's arguments.

"Mother says I wouldn't have to racket. She says that I'd be sheltered."

"Sheltered." His jaw bit on the word and snapped it into nothing. "Think you could stand the sheltering you'd get? If I don't miss my guess, you'd bolt. Remember the kind of mare my father bought? The kind that brought his buggy round the corner

on two wheels? He never dared to put a pair of blinders on her."

"Blinders?" she repeated.

"Yes," he said. "Isn't that the sort of harness that they're trying hard to get you into?"

She could only nod.

"But that's not the worst of it," he added. "Do you want to mate with run-out stock?"

"Mate" was a coarse, honest word, but it was one she didn't want to think about. When Cousin Belle kept talking of "assured position" and marrying back into the kind of world the Baileys had been used to, the farthest that Meg's thought had reached was to a big fashionable wedding in St. Stephen's Church. Between pews filled up with friends of Cousin Belle's, who were desirable, Meg, clad in white, was always going up the center aisle. But she never reached the chancel. Just as she was getting near to it, her mind reared quickly in revolt. She never had her veil thrown back in triumph as brides did in the chapel at West Point.

"Listen," she heard Dr. Bogert say. "Your mother thinks she'd like to have things easy for you. That's natural. I expect she hasn't had an easy time of it herself. But there's one thing she's forgetting."

Meg knew what it was, but he wasn't going to let her off from facing it.

"Think you could stand a brood of Hammonds, each the image of its father?"

"Don't," she begged. "Please, don't."

"Well," he said, "you have the answer to that gentleman. Any time you're being crowded just too far in that direction, you think over it. Or drop in again and I'll prescribe for you. Or I'll take time off and drive you down to Little Compton. How would that be?"

"That would finish off the Hammonds if they ever heard about it."

"All right, that's a bargain." He was holding out his hand and Grandmother's prescription. "You've got my offer in reserve if you should need it."

He had risen and, very formally, he was holding back the office door for her to leave.

CHAPTER XLIII

Grandmother's sharp words about "the verge" kept coming back into Meg's mind. Women who marched themselves up to the verge, Grandmother'd said, went over. And nobody wasted time to see where they had spilled to.

Yes, but they didn't have to go right to the very brink. They could stop short at any time they liked and refuse to take another step. Meanwhile they did feel alive and quick to dangers and excitements. They weren't living in "a realm" and bored beyond endurance while they were being courted by a Hammond. They weren't being told they must do this and not do that for the sake of something called appearances. They didn't care about appearances or about having their behavior guided. They thought up risks they never meant to run, but even thinking of them was a way of feeling free.

Her mother, though, apparently had no idea there was "a verge." It did not occur to her why Dr. Bogert dropped in oftener than he needed to. "He's devoted to your grandmother," she'd say. "I don't know what I'd ever do without him." She kept on being blind as to why his big car turned up Cushing Street and stood outside the door so frequently.

And it wasn't that Meg hadn't felt that she ought to give some warning. Hadn't she repeated his opinion of the Hammonds? But her mother hadn't thought that his opinion of the Hammonds counted, since only as a doctor did he touch the formal world they lived in.

Even when she had been told of his offer of a drive to Little Compton, all her mother'd said had been, "He didn't mean it seriously. He associates you with the place and he still thinks of you as being just a child."

"No," Meg had said, "he doesn't, and that's not the way he treats me."

"Remember that he's almost twice your age," her mother had spoken carelessly, "and he's used to women of experience. They're the only sort that he's been known to look at."

Her words had acted like a prod. Did she think her daughter only could attract a Hammond? Did she still think Meg should have been the boy and not the girl?

Dr. Bogert thought quite differently. He let her be aware of what he thought about her looks. There was a new estimation of them in his eyes when he had seen her wearing brilliant colors that would offend the Hammonds' sense of what was suitable. "I wouldn't call that 'blush'," he had remarked the other day. That was all he'd had to say about a dress that she had piped with scarlet, yet he had turned her wearing it into a kind of tribute paid to him.

Mostly, though, he had a way of giving her crisp, terse reminders of how she'd fare among the Hammonds. His reminders had to do with her being very careful not to sit in draughts or wearing rubbers when it wasn't raining or with veils and scarves and anything that swaddled and protected. Even when he'd said he meant to buy another car because his windshield didn't open wide enough to suit him, he had made her know exactly what he'd meant. Windshield was a code word. Hadn't she been stifled long enough? What about a good stiff gust of air?

At any rate, today she didn't have to think about him. He would never be at Mildred Jastrum's wedding out at Adamsville. She could be sure of that.

In a way it seemed too bad that they shouldn't meet when she was dressed for an occasion. They never had. And this elaborate white suit that Cousin Belle had given her was different from the things she made herself. It did give her style and make her seem much older and much more experienced. So did her hat that had cost what seemed a fortune for its lines and not for its finely braided straw or the single bunch of black glossy cherries that gave it such a dash. If she only didn't have to leave till after Dr. Bogert had made his morning call.

Her mother was proud of this new outfit, but she was saying things Meg knew had to be dealt with.

"If I feel hurt, it's just on your account. I can't bear it when you're not included. And you're one of Mildred's oldest friends. I should think she would have wanted you to be a bridesmaid."

Her remarks, like anything she said these days, would lead

straight to the Hammonds and the value of a name and a position so secure that no one could ignore it.

"Amey will have to sit up at the bridal table and be grand," Meg said. "She won't have half so good a time."

But her mother was afraid of Meg's good times. She thought that they meant doing things with no regard for looks or consequences.

"I know exactly how you'll act," she warned. "You'll go scooting off with Gid. I shouldn't wonder if you two strayed off and quite forgot there was a ceremony."

Gid! Instantly he was the only person in the world who mattered. Suppose that he was there and they could stray off and get away from everyone and be all by themselves. He'd make everything seem silly and unreal and not worth considering except as it was funny and ridiculous. She would be "Meg" and not Miranda and thinking things she honestly did think and breaking free of this stiff, stupid, silly world with its conventions and formalities. He'd see that she got out of it and he wouldn't lead her to a dangerous verge instead.

"Gid won't be there," she said.

Nothing that she wanted happened now. Not anything.

"Yes," her mother said, "he will. He's Mildred's cousin, isn't he? He'll come on from New York and be among the family. At least till you go scooting off with him."

"Scooting off with him." Meg wondered if he'd scoot with her. Maybe he'd go on being noble and still feel that he ought to keep away and give her a fair chance of finding someone whom he couldn't spoil for her. Quickly she'd have to make him understand how much she needed help and that there was one man he ought to spoil as fast as he could do it. Once he understood, he'd stop her playing tricks with danger and make her feel secure and not so lonely and afraid.

All the way down to the station she kept planning what she meant to say to him. But once she'd reached Mildred's crowded, very special train and was on board and searching through the throng of guests, she couldn't find Gid anywhere. Instead, Harold Hammond had found her. They were sharing a worn plush-covered seat.

And now that the train was on its way, there was an awful

brooding meaning to his words. Though she had edged off and was looking out the window at the small mill villages, so neat and spick and span beneath the spattering shade of elms, she had to be aware of the intention of his words. They all had to do with marriage and made a sort of *Prothalamion*. This wasn't just a clear June day. It was, he said, the day the little bride had prayed for. Something in Meg stiffened. Did he truly think, she asked, that brides grew little on the mornings of their weddings and that they prayed and that their prayers got answered? He didn't act as though he heard her meaning to be cross and disagreeable and balking at his thoughts and refusing utterly to share them. She must admit that the sky itself was an auspicious omen, he continued. Did she see a single cloud on the horizon? No. And had she noticed how the countryside had treasured up its store to bloom for the occasion, and how no matter where they looked they might see Nature proffering her bouquet?

At last there was the little chocolate-colored station and it was good to see it proffering only a real honest ugliness. Harold couldn't link it up with sentiment. He could only lead her by it quickly and find space for them both in one of the waiting cars.

This drive up to the Jastrums' wasn't like the careless, happy drives that she remembered. A motor chugged right by the watering trough into which Kitty, the black mare, had used to plunge her nose and whicker till ripples rose around the edges, coated green with slime. It sped by the General Store and the long row of saloons where Mildred used to say that the Irish Catholics got drunk on Saturdays. It went so fast that Meg was catching only glimpses of steep, gutted banks that were topped by picket fences and of the long reach of roofs that slanted down and capped the windows of the double tenements. And she could see just an occasional flash of the Pawtuxet River; not the slow, still space where the water gathered strength before it leaped across the dam, not the little shady cove where Mildred had so often sculled her boat while Meg had trailed her hand in the cool water that smelled so pleasantly of roots and leaf mould. In no time at all, she and Harold were turning in the circling drive and they were getting out and standing on the smoothly shaven lawn.

But they were in entirely the wrong place. This side of the wide,

terraced grounds, as Harold was quick to say, was meant for tenantry. What a silly word to apply to millhands who now had labor unions and who, as everybody knew, kept giving trouble out at Adamsville. Today, however, they looked tame enough, got up in their best clothes. Apparently they'd been given a whole holiday and told that they might see the bride. Not for very long, of course; and they seemed to know that they mustn't troop up very close and get too near the guests. In patient, awkward groups they were keeping at a proper distance; and here they'd have to wait till Mildred, clad in her travelling suit, came out the side door and left amid a shower of rice. They would be rewarded by a glimpse.

Did they want it? Probably the Irish really did. Mostly they'd grown up at Adamsville and known Mildred since she was a child who had called them all by their first names and commandeered their services and treated them in her own friendly, but toplofty way. But what about the Poles and Slavs and other kinds of foreigners who had settled here in recent years? If they liked the privilege of coming in the gate for once and waiting in the blazing sun, their stolid faces didn't show it. They looked sullen as they stood in front of the great larch trees that had branches like fringed curtseys, tasselling down upon each other and growing smaller as they reached the top.

As Meg mounted the stone steps with Harold, two little boys were using the side granite slabs for slides and went whizzing by with their feet out very straight in front of them. Then up they picked themselves and scrambled ahead with the seats of their white linen trousers very smirched. Nobody cared. Nobody stopped them. Probably their parents were among this well-dressed throng of people who were milling around on the wide porch and crowding towards the open door.

If Nature had proffered a bouquet, the Jastrums had been quick to snatch it. They must have sent their gardeners off to strip the countryside of laurel; for, pink and white and delicately crisp, it stood in bushes all along the side of the wide panelled hall and it filled the corners and garlanded the balustrade of the long flight of stairs. On one table was a pyramid of white moiré-covered boxes and they made Meg think of Mildred saying, "I won't have

anything that isn't marked with my initials." Across the corner of each box that wasn't hidden by another, her initials were standing out resplendently in gold.

"Do let's stay out here," Meg said to Harold as she felt his hand upon her arm directing her. "We don't belong among the family."

But before she knew it he had buttonholed an usher who had led them into the front parlor and near a bower made of smilax that dripped down in feathery green strands from an enormous satin wedding bell suspended from the ceiling. And on every side, there were white roses, clumped and banked and wilting from the heat.

Where was the bridegroom? Even though Meg had never had the chance of meeting him, she should be able to select him from the other men here in this room. There were the ushers who each wore sprays of lilies-of-the-valley in their left lapels and were busy straightening out an aisle and crowding people back behind the bands of satin ribbon. There was old ex-Governor Adams, looking very privileged and lonely as he sat way up in front in his wheelchair with his long black ear-trumpet coiled across the front of his cream-colored linen suit. Nearby and gotten up for the occasion was "Uncle Phil," "Old Pen," who'd once wished to take Meg driving and had created such a commotion in her household. Was that a toupee he was wearing? It didn't seem more false than his moustache waxed into pointed tusks. His heavy-lidded eyes still goggled at her as he bowed, and with one glance he showed that he remembered. Then he went back to a clicking sort of whisper with a man who seemed about his age.

Mrs. Jastrum was like a very formal guest in her own house. Her hat was nodding with stiff, close-set flowers and on the wide front of her beige satin dress was a corsage of very purple orchids that kept tipping sidewise and showing silver tinfoil under a gauze bow. This was not the sort of hospitality that she liked dispensing. "I don't trust any caterer," Meg heard her say to someone. Then she added something very scornful about patty shells and ices and a caterer from Boston. Her tone of voice was meant to show that her opinion of a caterer was very low indeed.

That couldn't be what she was truly thinking and her remarks

must be a form of nervousness while she was fretting over Mildred, who must be almost ready to appear.

At last the string orchestra, half-hidden in a grove of palms, had begun to play the wedding march and, like everybody else, Meg was glancing towards the hall. Slowly approaching came a bevy, a real bevy. It was made up less of individual girls than of floating lace and tulle and chiffon and of fluttering white orchids and rivulets of ribbon that went drifting by.

Mr. Jastrum brought things down to earth and made them real. He was on Meg's side of the aisle and never had he looked so competently handsome. He'd always liked to talk of men who were or weren't presentable. In his suit of snowy flannels marked with the finest dark-blue pin stripe, and with an extra burnish to his iron-gray hair and an extra polish to his florid, ruddy face, he was showing that he was presentable indeed.

Moving slowly with him was a filmy tent. Through the long, sheer, shimmering face veil, Mildred's profile faintly showed. It couldn't change in outline. If Meg knew suddenly that she was seeing Mildred terrified, it was from the way the bride tried to lift her gaze and smile and from the tight-lipped quiver of her mouth.

Harold Hammond's hand was tightening on Meg's arm. He meant to let her know that he was moved and he wished her to know why. He wasn't moved by Mildred but by thoughts of her. He saw her, virginal and dewy, coming up an aisle to where he would be waiting for her. Just a sign of yielding on her part, just a scant word of encouragement, no more than the most timid, modest hint of a confession of her willingness, and she would be pledged irrevocably. He was begging for that hint.

Suddenly, however, Meg didn't have to think about him. The thickest man who had been talking to "Old Pen" was now standing close to Mildred; and it simply wasn't right for him to be a bridegroom. He had no relation to the strands of dripping smilax or to the diaphanous veil that brushed against his shoulder or to the satin wedding bell. Beneath his cream-white flannel suit his heavy figure looked held in place and corseted; and as he held his head turned sidewise, one prong of a stiff collar dug into a ruddy jowl. What if his sandy, slightly graying hair was neatly cut and sleek?

He had an oxlike head with a heavy, sleeping, slumbrous brow and blunted features. There was a settled pouch below his eye and a thick fold of flesh that outlined his moustache and made a solid curve about his mouth.

Mildred couldn't be in love with him. She couldn't possibly. She shouldn't stand there saying that she'd take him as her wedded husband. Not all the riches in the world would compensate for his having any right to take her as his wife. She shouldn't vow to cherish someone about whom there was nothing cherishable. Even if she tried, this man would never know that she was doing it. He'd trample without so much as sensing he was trampling.

Now he was endowing Mildred with all his worldly goods, and that made sense. Undoubtedly he had them. But he didn't have a troth to plight. Those were mere words he was repeating. And those two weren't being married according to God's Holy Ordinance. They were being married for reasons with which God would refuse to have a thing to do.

And there wasn't one excuse for Mildred. She had money of her own. She wasn't going to change the fortunes of her family. She didn't have to think about the ease and comforts she could bring to those who'd had to skimp and save and live precariously. "I don't see how any girl in your position thinks she can refuse." The voice of Cousin Belle, Meg could hear sounding in her ears. Suppose that she accepted. Nothing that happened to her could be quite so bad as what lay ahead of Mildred and that she'd chosen of her own free will.

The man who had become her wedded husband right before Meg's eyes made Harold seem refined and gently bred. Narrowness and prejudice she would have to reckon with, but never coarseness. At least she would be worshipped and treated reverentially. Too much so. Wasn't that the trouble? Maybe, though, it was a trouble that she could get used to. Maybe it was one that she might grow to like in time, be proud of even. She might be grateful that "a verge" was something fascinating from which she had been saved without venturing very near.

"Oh, Perfect Love," the soloist had sung here in this very room where she'd been witness to a ceremony that made the song grotesquely out of keeping. Who was she to save herself for perfect

love without a chance on earth of finding it? Courtesy meant something, didn't it? So did adoration. So did a certain way of living. Things that she'd wanted she could have and she could make her life from them.

While she had been thinking, she had been moving slowly forward with the throng, the first of whom had offered their congratulations and were turning back.

"You'll be the next to go," said Mildred, after Meg had kissed her. "I'll have to toss my bouquet to a bridesmaid. But you don't need it. I'll be coming on from Jersey to your wedding."

In a voice pitched high intentionally, she had spoken loud enough to have the words reach Harold.

"Here's luck," Mildred called as he came forward. She had broken off a spray from her bouquet for him, and as he turned away, Meg could feel some stalks of lily-of-the-valley being put into her hand.

She could slip them through a braided loop in the front of her white coat and wear them like a badge. Harold would love that as a modest hint and know she meant to listen to him. By the time they left for home he would have led her to a nook.

But she felt her fingers slack their grasp. Her eyes were meeting Gid's.

Here he was, exactly as she liked to think about him. He had not a feature that she hadn't treasured in her memory, but in contrast to the faces near her his face seemed more sensitive and finely shaped. What she had forgotten was his eyes. Not the fact that they were deep-set and curiously tawny in contrast to his straight, black, almost-meeting eyebrows, but that they held so much beneath the surface. They were tragic, although they lighted up and smiled; and when they looked they understood.

"Let's go outside and get away," he said as he came near.

If Harold Hammond thought that she was being rude, she couldn't help it. If he meant to tell her that she'd never have another chance to give a modest hint, she couldn't help that either. He was just someone standing in her way and trying hard to stop her from escaping.

"But it's Gid," she heard herself insisting. "It's not as though it was just anybody."

She was being bold and brazen, and Harold meant to let her know it. His upper lip was trembling.

"I'm not Labor," she protested, "and I can't be driven back into my realm. I haven't got a realm. I never had one."

Her mother had been right. She didn't care about the looks or consequences. Not when it came to larking off with Gid.

CHAPTER XLIV

They were rid of all the throng and by themselves, and they were heading for the Jastrums' garden. Off to the right was the Druid's circle of dark, gloomy arbor vitae. But right ahead of them there was a sunny oblong cut into a ruddy, solid hedge of beech.

In a moment they were walking down the pebbled path that ran between a length of lawn and a wide flower bed massed with bloom. If they paused they could begin to quarrel, as they always had, about the plants they liked or hated. That might be the easiest way of being unembarrassed by what had happened to them each, without the other's knowledge. But——

"We didn't get away to sit among the grandifloras," Gid remarked. "We can cut up through the woods and reach your Cousin Julia's."

"Cousin Julia's dead," Meg said. "Her house is all done over. I don't believe I want to see it. There's too much to remember."

There was. He felt so too. As they reached the fringe of a deep pine grove and began to tread on slippery red needles, he was walking silently, but Meg knew what he was thinking of. Cousin Julia had understood. She had wanted them to have the sort of lifelong kinship that she herself had had. She had recognized a bond between them that was different from a bond that they might have with anybody else. She hadn't thought they should disclaim it. "The right person would be sure to understand. Meg's mother did." Wasn't that what she'd told Gid? And wasn't there the letter that she'd written not so long before her death? "False pride can be as mean a weed as pusley. Any time you catch it growing, yank

it up before it's taken a firm root." She hadn't had to mention names to make Meg understand the meaning of those words.

Now was the time for Meg to show she wasn't proud and that she was searching for some way to get back to a sure footing.

"Gid," she began as they started up a sombre aisle that led between the massive columns of big pines, "Cousin Julia'd be the first to say there wasn't any sense in our going on like this. She'd think I ought to know a little bit about you. I only know you're living in New York and working in your father's office. Not how or anything."

Had they grown so far apart that Gid distrusted her? His face was turned away as they went along in silence and she could feel him making up his mind.

"I don't live in New York," he said at last. "Not really. I just board there." Then, after a long pause, he added, "Remember the plants your father used to call 'escapes' because they wouldn't stay in bounds and slipped outside a fence. I took a tip from them."

"You mean you've bought a place?" As Meg asked, she was recalling how he'd told her that someday she would come and see it and put on airs about the splendors that there'd been at Hillwood.

"Bought my place? What do you think?" he answered fiercely. "You don't suppose my father'd let me have the money for that kind of truck and nonsense, do you? I get less cash than any of the office clerks."

But clerks didn't go about in quite that cut of flannels or have suits that fitted easily. Gid had caught the meaning of her glance.

"I'm allowed a charge account for clothes," he said. "I'm near enough the throne to have to be presentable. Otherwise, I'm being cured of all my fancy foolishness. I have to prove I'm worth my salt."

"Worth your salt?"

"Yes," he said. "The kind that's damp and soggy in a shaker and that gets passed around the one long table in a boarding-house." His voice was edged with bitterness. "If you want so much to know about the way I live, my bedroom's only got one window. When I look out of it I see a high brick wall that says Dodd, Mead

& Company in big black letters. I can see them and nothing else, not even an ailanthus tree. I got so that I had to touch the aspidistra plants every time I went by a saloon."

As he stopped he stood quite still and laid his hand against the knotted bole of a big tree trunk. It was a gesture that Meg had seen him make so many times, but now it had a strange new poignance. "Some day he's going to come an awful cropper. He shouldn't be aware of any green thing growing." Wasn't that what her father had said about him?

"I don't see how you stand it, Gid," she said.

She was surprised to hear him laugh.

"I've escaped and I don't have to stand it," he was saying gleefully. "Not since I took the ferry across Sheepshead Bay and found the beach at Rockaway. You wouldn't guess I was a squatter, would you?"

"A squatter?" That was a word for clam-diggers all along the shore lines of Rhode Island. They were rough characters who lived from hand to mouth and slept in little shacks perched up on stilts with a high tide creeping up their steps and washing underneath their floorings.

It was such a shack that Meg heard Gid describing proudly.

"I made it out of driftwood," he was saying. "I had to wait for the big storms to get enough to build it. Then some of the fellows down there showed me how. They helped me sheath it with tarpaper. It has a lean-to for a kitchen and a room that has two bunks. Right now I'm working on the door."

She could see him sitting in the blazing sunlight, planing and grooving too with strong sure hands that knew instinctively the way of tools. But she could see, too, the formidable entrance of Gid's regal house in Providence.

"I spend almost every Sunday on the beach," Gid added. "I go even in the winter time. I have a lot of fun."

Didn't she know the knack he had of making friends with simple people? When she thought of him at Little Compton, didn't she often think of him as digging bait with fishermen up in the cove behind the breakwater? Or as helping them mend their seines or splice their ropes or open up their lobster pots? But "squatters" seemed entirely different.

"It can't be safe," she said. "Some night you'll get your throat cut."

"No," he said, "I won't. When the fellows found I didn't put on city airs, we got along all right. They don't like my city clothes, but that's all that they don't like about me. Once I strip, they don't see any difference and there isn't any. Only that I can outswim them, at least most of them."

He had made Meg recall a swim of his when she had seen him dive off a high cliff in desperation, then strike the water and make out beyond the surf, beyond the undertow. Later there had been a quiet pasture where they'd talked. That day they had been close, so close that he had told her of his horror. "It still shows in my eyes," he'd said. That had been why she had kissed him. Well, he wasn't desperate and he didn't need her now.

"I can do nearly everything the others can," he was proclaiming. "That's one reason why we're friends."

But if Gid seemed to her an arch-aristocrat among the Jastrums' wedding guests, what must he seem to squatters? "They can't take you for their kind," she said. "They couldn't possibly."

"It's my going back to town that bothers them," he said. "They think that I could get to be a life-guard if I made a stab at it. But I'm their kind all right when it comes to beachcombing. We don't talk much, you see. We're much too busy doing things. I do things all day long on Sundays. Then I can go back to New York and stick my room out for another week. I can even take the Western buyers out to dinner and trot them to burlesque shows. I'm allowed another special fund for that."

It was a funny, furtive life. Dangerous, too, from any point of view.

"Your father doesn't know?" It was a silly thing to ask. Meg could imagine Mr. Codman's fury.

"He thinks I'm being swell out on Long Island at some house-party," Gid explained. "He thinks that I'm kowtowing somewhere. I do it just enough to have him hear about it. I choose the times when somebody's come on from Providence. They're sure to take word home."

Apparently Gid's way of living suited him, for his skin was a

warm, coppery brown and he wasn't fidgety or nervous. She had never seen him so relaxed.

But she felt left out and she didn't want to be left out. Now that they had left the grove, they had come out on a meadow that was bright with yellow mustard. From old custom, they were skirting it and following an edge where it ran out and ended with red sorrel. And they were walking as they'd always walked, so that their steps fell into the same time whether they slowed or quickened.

"I do wish you could have bought your place," Meg started. "I wish that it existed even if I couldn't see it. First of all, you'd promise me you'd never grow a rose-bed."

"Men don't have roses," Gid was interrupting. "Men don't even like them. They just send them to the kind of girl who's sure to be impressed by them."

"I'm not impressed by them," Meg said, "and I have to get one every day. It's white. It's not even a red rose. And it's supposed to be a sign of purity."

"Who ever taught you all that mucky language?" Gid remarked.

They were sitting down on a big rock that had crinkled patches of deep-orange lichen, and all at once she was pouring out her tale of the past month. There were her strolls with Cousin Belle and the little peeks at gardens and the dreadful formal calls in the drawing rooms of dowagers. There was her call upon the Hammonds and the awful consequences. There was everything but Dr. Bogert and "the verge." That she couldn't seem to talk about and shied away from. She had to keep on telling of Miranda culling wild flowers in the meadows and of the delicate, shy, prudish little prissy that she was supposed to be.

"You think it's funny, don't you?" she broke off. "Well, it's not one bit funnier than your New York boardinghouse. And a girl can't run away and turn into a squatter, can she? Of course she can't. And, Gid"—soon she would be crying if she wasn't careful—"everybody thinks I ought to marry well to help the family. I'm not in a position to refuse. That's what Cousin Belle keeps telling me. I don't see what I'm ever going to do."

"Just say you won't," Gid said. "That's easy."

"No," she said. "It's not. Something turns up every day. They're

little things and they wouldn't matter if I didn't know that I could help about them. Sometimes it's only Father's dressing gown. It's so shabby . . ."

"It's been shabby ever since I can remember," Gid was interrupting. "And has anybody minded? Don't be silly."

"But it's more than dressing gowns. It's Grandma's doctor's bills and people growing old and everything. Besides"—and another deeper sort of shame came flooding up—"Mother seems to want it so. Not for herself. She truly doesn't think about herself. She's scared for me. She wants me to be safe."

"That's something you won't ever be. She ought to know that much about you." Gid was ready to give battle now.

"Maybe mothers don't. Maybe they can't. I expect they get so that they only think about what's scared them and forget what's made them happy."

"Your mother thrive on risks," Gid said. "When I think about her, I think of how she's liked to tackle threats and dangers."

"She's been sure about herself," Meg said. "She isn't sure of me."

"But your father is. He'd never want to have you marry for mere safety."

How could she explain about her father? Did she have to put in words his odd withdrawal and the fact that they now seemed almost strangers to each other? There were the books they couldn't seem to share and the thoughts and the convictions that they couldn't seem to talk about.

"Father's scared, too." Why he was she hadn't understood before but suddenly she felt she knew. She had not turned out to be the sort of daughter that he'd hoped for. In his heart he'd hoped for an Elaine, the Lily Maid, or for Ben Bolt's Alice who would smile and tremble at a laugh or frown; for the sort of girl who would prove to be the kind of wife he'd missed in Mother. The gentle romance that he'd never had himself he longed to watch, to watch and to take joy in. That was why he had so hoped that she might find a gallant officer when they had spent the summer at West Point. Her reverence for her husband was to be a kind of compensation.

"I've shocked Father, Gid," Meg said. "I've terrified him. He

can't bear it when I tell him that I have met girls who think that marriage is old-fashioned. I did know some in Chicago. He doesn't think they're noble when they prove that free unions can be sacred too. He won't admit they have nobility. And he simply hates my reading books where the heroines are prostitutes. You see he isn't used to them."

"Are you?" Gid asked. "Except in junky trash? You wouldn't recognize a street-walker if you saw one. Your father ought to know that you were talking through your hat."

"Anyhow he's terrified," Meg said. "If he weren't, he would stop everybody's badgering me. He used to think that marriage ought to mean a rich companionship."

"He still thinks so."

"Then why doesn't he come out and say so? No," Meg protested, "he believes that Mother may be wise, wiser than he. He never speaks of husbands now as gallant. He speaks of them as gently bred and chivalrous and courteous. Gid, will I have to have a husband who's just courteous?"

"Not on your life, you won't," he answered quickly. "You'll make tracks and escape."

He made it sound so simple when it wasn't simple.

"Where would I escape to?"

"To New York. It's as good a place as any. Maybe," he added, "it's a better place than any for a girl who earns her living. I meet a lot of girls who work. They think it's fun to work. Why shouldn't you? And you could get a job all right. You're a Bryn Mawr graduate, aren't you? Then why don't you use your college education as a kind of key?"

What? Pack her bag? Pick up and leave? That would mean she'd have to face a scene that would hurt everybody's feelings. This was her year; the idle year that Mother meant to lavish on her. If she went away from home she'd hurt her mother and her father dreadfully. And that wasn't all. She would be leaving everything with which she was familiar. Besides, she would stop being like the girls she knew and be cutting herself off from everything that was usual and accepted. Girls didn't often marry, once they'd started in to teach. And what else could they do and be thought of as respectable? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Say she tried for

a position? Who would take her? Suppose nobody took her? Things happened in New York to girls who had no money. They disappeared and turned into White Slaves. Nobody ever heard of them again.

"You could come down to Rockaway and see my shack," Meg heard Gid say.

"I don't want to see your shack," she said. "And I don't want to turn into a working woman and not ever marry. What's the sense in my pretending? Why shouldn't I want children just like any other woman? Can't we ever, ever have them, Gid?"

Forever she was going to know this glaring rock beneath her eyes and remember that it had a fissure that was pocketed with little tufts of grass and that it had one bald white knob of granite where the tiny ants looked very black as they passed over it in a ceaseless to and fro. She would recall the heat that lay in one rough, hot patch of lichen underneath her outspread hand. But she would know, too, that she hadn't been ashamed.

"Say we had all the luck there is," Gid said at last. "All the time we'd watch and be afraid of what might happen, even if it didn't happen. We'd be looking out for trouble all the time. And without children you'd feel cheated. You'd be bound to. Then if you did, I'd start to hate you. When I hate, I know a lot of ways to hurt. That's a side of me you haven't seen. It's one that you're not going to see."

He paused and looked across the meadow to where a little hornbeam stood with its branches curving out. In habit, it was exactly like a bigger hornbeam that filled a corner of the low stone walls. Both were standoffish, their branches curving out with a fierce thrust. Young cedars, too, were just like old ones. They were stiff blades on hilts, flat to the wind no matter what their size. There was something in the nature of them that made them follow their own lines. But it was not the same with people. It mattered whom they married. Their children didn't have to be like them.

"I can manage by myself," Gid spoke as though he had identified himself with the fierce single tree. "I can manage by myself if I'm alone. I can't stand having people near me."

"What about the squatters on the beach?" Meg asked.

"I get up and walk away from them at any time I like," he said.

"They don't mind it if I walk away. Besides, they're only fellows. They're not you."

Meg watched an iridescent bright-green beetle drop down on the rock and close its wings. When they were folded carefully, she spoke.

"Then if I came on to New York, we wouldn't see each other?"

Gid picked up a handful of raw earth and crumbled it and sifted it between his fingers. Now that he was speaking, his words didn't seem at first to have to do with the question that she'd asked.

"In five years I'll own my place," he said. "By then I will have shown I'm worth my salt. I've got my eye on land out in Connecticut. It's got cedar pastures. It might be Rhode Island except that the nearest water is the Sound. Once I own it, I'll be queerer than Dick's hatband if I want to be. If I take a shine to anyone, I'll ask him out and give him a free rein. And I won't have any butler or servant who kowtows to me. I'll get rid of lugs for good and all."

He was planning his whole life and she wasn't in it anywhere till suddenly she heard him say:

"You'll come out and help me plant a copper beech way out in the far pasture. We'll see what happens to it when it hasn't got a big brick mansion back of it. We'll put it in its place for once."

"What makes you think I'll come?" Meg asked.

"Because you will." He sounded very sure. "You'll be living in New York. You will have bolted off from Providence. You couldn't stick the Hammonds and you know you couldn't. It's not your family you're truly thinking of. You like to play with the idea of being grand. Well, you'll be grander on your own and working. Who's going to boss you then? Not anybody. You'll earn the right to do exactly as you like. As soon as you decide, you're to send me word you're coming."

"Why would I send word to you when you don't want me?"

"That isn't what I said," he answered fiercely. "Can't you play fair if I can? Miss Leavitt and Miss Leffingwell would take you into their apartment. They're librarians and they're older women and they're both good friends of mine. They'd be in the background till you needed them."

"Where would you be? Nowhere."

"I'd be in the background, too," he said, "unless you needed me. Once we were sure of how things stood between us, they're a lot of things that we could do together. First we'd make sure. Then we'd start in having fun."

The thought of that was all that he had given her to carry back across the yellow mustard field that they were skirting. Steadily the thought grew less real as they passed into the sombre grove of pines and headed for the Jastrums'. She had gone larking off with Gid; but though she felt him walking by her side, she was coming back alone, more alone than she had ever been.

CHAPTER XLV

Girls did crazy things when they were lonely and unhappy. If they couldn't get their way, they tried excitement. There was the kind they were supposed to get from books, but that only made real life seem duller in comparison. But there was the kind they could provoke if they dared to create a situation of their own and used themselves to play a part in it. That was a good way to forget.

It stopped, Meg knew, her thinking about Gid. When she and Gid had been together, she hadn't thought about the nearness of his arm to hers and had a separate pleasure in its nearness. Nor had she ever thought about his hand as touching hers with a real intention in its touch.

But Dr. Bogert made her be aware of him. Not of his mind, not of anything that he might have to say, but of him as a man, intimately hostile to her. If she gave in an inch, it would be to an enemy. It would mean that she admitted the attraction of a sure male strength, of a firm, bronzed, wind-tanned skin, and of eyes that were forever testing her defenses, and of features that were boldly shaped. His close-clipped dark moustache couldn't hide the fullness of his lower lip, but that and the clean jut of his jaw only added to his boldness. Sitting next to him in his open car was venturing close to danger. It wasn't like those stodgy Hammond drives that inevitably ended at the Hunt Club and that her mother knew about. This was her very own adventure, known to nobody.

She was doing something that no other girl would dream of doing, by setting off for the whole day with a much older man who had what people called "a reputation." And she wasn't sure how she was going to meet what lay ahead.

Deep down, too, she was ashamed of being fascinated by the thought of spending hours alone with someone who only looked at women of experience. There was something cheap in being proud that she had made him look at her.

Why did she want to act like a character in a trashy, paper-covered novel? She was behaving like a heroine thought up by Victoria Cross and certainly not like a heroine of Ibsen's. And she had been presented with an Ibsen situation, hadn't she? What Gid had asked of her was quite as bleak and noble as anything concocted in an Ibsen tragedy. But she simply couldn't go on being bleak and noble. She was not that sort. Something in her shook the situation off and refused to go on dealing with it. Instead, she wanted one where nobody was sick in mind or sensitive or complicated. Dr. Bogert surely wasn't. For the first time since the Jastrum wedding, she was living in the moment. This drive with the breeze whistling past the windshield was her own rebellion and escape.

And with Providence simmering in the July heat, she was glad not to be sitting in the close, unstimulating shade of "dear" Mrs. Shepard's garden or reading at the Athenaeum or even behind the closely shuttered blinds in her own room. She wanted dreadfully to go to Little Compton and to old Dr. Bogert's house set high up on a ledge, open to the gales and with a wide, unbroken view of the whole coast.

So far on the drive, she had had to deal with questions that were obviously meant to tease her. A year ago, when she had talked about the single standard for both men and women, what exactly had she thought it meant? Had she ever known a girl who dared to try out her convictions? All right. If she hadn't seen her afterwards, what did she think had happened to her? Why hadn't she found out from common curiosity? If she had let her friend drop from sight and disappear, she hadn't been much tempted to follow her example, had she? Why not? Surely not for lack of opportunity. From lack of courage then? Girls of this generation spoke

of being free, but they weren't as much rebels as they thought, not really, were they?

"I'm not," Meg had admitted. "If I only could, I'd want to marry."

She was thinking about Gid. Dr. Bogert needn't act as though her words had any reference to him. But very quickly he'd begun to talk about his father and of how his father had gone his way regardless of opinion and indifferent to all company except his son's.

"Not that he didn't keep a tight hand on the reins," Dr. Bogert went on speaking. "I had to intern twice at Bellevue before he'd have me in his office. But outside of office hours he put up with a lot of monkeyshines. Joined me in them too, when he had time. Liked to join me. After all, there weren't more than twenty years between us."

"Your father must have married awfully young."

"Younger than he meant to, by a long shot." There was a sort of bitterness in Dr. Bogert's voice.

"But you two had fun, more fun than you could have had if he'd been older. I know," Meg said, "because of my own mother."

"We were talking about fathers." He had cut her off. "In a way we were like brothers. There wasn't any sense in having outside friends when we could have each other's company. Besides, we were alike," he said.

Which wasn't true.

Whatever the old doctor had been, he had been simple in his tastes and unextravagant. Right to the very end, Meg could remember him as a massive and heroic figure, dressed in the same way and whirling around a corner in the same kind of shabby buggy. Impossible to think of him as taking to a motor cap and linen duster and a black-and-white check suit, however fine the check. Or as owning an expensive car or as being known to have "a reputation." Nor had he been so groomed and well turned out and handsome as the man beside her. A certain sort of animal good looks had been passed down by Mrs. Bogert.

"It's your mother you resemble really," Meg began. She was about to tell how clearly she remembered their one meeting when she realized that she had been stopped short.

Her companion was now driving fast and silently. Fall River, with its mills and chimneys and its dingy outskirts, was behind them. So was the Stone Bridge at Tiverton. Sometimes the road kept turning, twisting through a leafy tunnel. Sometimes it shot past a long stretch of quiet meadows, past the white faces of small farmhouses or past little villages grouped round a church or a green patch of Common. But it never really left the coastline and now the gleaming stretch of Narragansett Bay was widening out and out.

From the brow of this high hill they could look off and see the whole of it. By its deeper purplish blue, Meg was making out the zigzag course of the whole channel when she heard Dr. Bogert speaking.

"Look," he said. "There's my father's house off yonder."

"Yonder" seemed a funny homespun country word for anyone to use who was so dashing. All the same, it was exactly the right word for all that dazzling distance that lay between them and the landmark that was visible for miles and miles.

"Before," Meg said, "when I've seen it from far off, I've seen it from the steamboat. To children it meant something very special. It was the first sign that we were truly getting to the seashore. I don't suppose I ever thought I'd see it with you from an automobile."

"I began myself to think you mightn't."

There was an implication in his tone of voice that made her understand exactly what he wanted her to say: "I tried not to come. I didn't mean to come. But any girl you asked would give in finally." That was the kind of tribute that he must be used to, even from those women of experience.

"I like doing things much better when I do them casually," Meg said.

He had slowed down enough to turn and smile at her with knowing, half-shut eyes. "I think I'd call you almost anything but casual," he announced.

Then, in a little while, he had steered his car off the white sandy road and stopped it on a bank that made a kind of terrace. Far below them the wide reaches of salt marsh were ruffling in the wind and taking shadows from the clouds that went racing out to

sea at a tremendous gallop. At its business, the tide was filling little guts of channel and linking the small ponds in the low-water meadows. And sloping towards them were the rocky pastures girded by stone walls; acre lengths of grass that were soft and blowy, next to the tilled cornfields. Without any effort on her part, a whole remembered scene was fitting in together in great restful spaces.

"I'm glad I came," Meg said.

"To see the view?" asked Dr. Bogert as though this time she'd have to say she liked the sense of being all alone with him.

"Even when I was a little girl"—purposely she made her voice sound childlike—"my father was forever taking me somewhere to see a view. My mother used to say he'd trudge my legs off."

"And instead he did quite well by them." Dr. Bogert meant for her to be embarrassed and she was.

Then he changed to talking of the countryside around them, talking as though he owned it in some special way and discussing it in terms that made it strange and different. In the autumn, it was posted just for him; and there wasn't a square inch of ground he hadn't tramped across. Not at this time of year, of course. You didn't take your dogs out till September when you could begin to look for snipe and yellow legs and rail. Plover, too, and birds along the shore.

She could see them with their quiet habits broken, not teetering and tilting through the eel grass that they threaded delicately with their bills, but rising in a startled panic. And she could see a single predatory figure searching out their hidden, secret life.

However, she was not to think of that unequal contest. She was to consider the salt marsh to the left. As she gazed at it, a happy memory came back.

"Why that," she said, "is where my father used to go to find *sabatia*."

"*Sabatia*." Dr. Bogert made it sound a silly word and searching for a plant seem sillier.

"But it's rare," she added quickly. "My father had to hunt for it. When the other botanists came down from Harvard, he used to take them off to scour that marsh. They spent a whole day browsing through it for some very special finds for their herbariums."

It seemed, though, that botanizing after wild flowers didn't count. Nor did the high distinction of the men who did it. It was wiser to be still and listen to another kind of prowess that was much more masculine. You thatched your boat with grass and you hid it in the sedge. You didn't need a blind, not when you had a natural screen. Then you waited for a nippy, frosty morning in November or even in October. There would be frozen ground and ice between the tussocks. Dawn would come white and cold; and with mist lifting slowly from the water, there would be a stir of wings. Then you could get a bag of ducks, more than you wanted to lug home, more than you could get rid of. But every one of them was a good proof of marksmanship; a better test than quail or partridge, even a better one than woodcock that were getting scarcer. The whole quiet countryside, the swamps and thickets and the pastureland, were turned into a hunting ground that furnished game.

"I'm glad my father goes out after plants," Meg interrupted. "I'm glad he doesn't use a gun."

"I'd hate to have him loose with one and be in range of it," a crisp voice mocked.

"My father shot all through the Civil War," Meg flamed. "Your father may have cut off arms and legs on battlefields. My father went on shooting."

"Look here," Dr. Bogert said. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I don't suppose I think about professors as though they were exactly men."

He couldn't realize that the arm he'd put around her shoulders, as though he thought that he was comforting a child, was ridiculously out of place. She was defending fiercely a whole way of living and the men who thought that way of living worth the dedication of their minds. Darwin not quite a man, nor Linnaeus, nor Huxley, nor Asa Gray? Nor the scientists who were her father's friends? Hadn't their desire for knowledge led them on adventures that drew on every ounce they had of hardihood, of superhuman risk and hardihood? But no matter what she told of them, they still stayed slightly comic figures to the man beside her. Boring figures, too, out of a world that didn't count.

"Let's drive on," she said at last.

Soon they were passing landmarks that she recognized. A forking of the way led to the Swamp Road with its fringe of bracken. Now they were coming to a sway-backed weatherbeaten farmhouse; and at the sight of it she felt her heart catch suddenly. Lilacs had grown up around it like a high and secret guard. But it was a guard that she and Gid had broken through one day when they had been off prowling. She could remember how they had wedged back the door and gone through every room and pretended that the house was going to be their very own, to mend and patch and furnish with new life.

Nearby was a little family burial ground that they had searched through too, bending back the soft tall grass to look at names; old family names that both of them laid claim to. "Abigail, the amiable consort of." They had read her name on a slate stone, and Gid had insisted that she belonged to him and was only in his line. "An amiable consort" was, he'd said, the last kind of wife that anyone would think of asking Meg to be.

Now he wasn't going to ask her to be any kind of wife at all. But if they weren't going to marry and to be together, that surely didn't mean that she would have to go through life all by herself. It couldn't mean that she'd miss everything.

"Something the matter?" Dr. Bogert asked as though he ruled a world that ought to be exactly right for anybody in his company.

"Yes," Meg said. "No matter where I look I start up memories. I keep flushing them just like the quail you talked about."

"There's one, at any rate, that we won't kill," he said. "Recall the day I drove you home and set you down in that front yard?"

"Yes," she admitted as she saw the gleaming clam-shell drive and the long porch of the Seaburys' summer boardinghouse. "That day my Cousin Cora Simmons said that if I was going to rattle round in dog-carts with you it was high time she wrote to Mother."

"At the time she didn't have to worry, did she?" Dr. Bogert had turned his question to a comment that was very personal. "As I recall, I tried to get the promise of a dive from you."

She knew well the kind of dive he'd wanted; one that stretched a young girl's body slim and taut till it was curved into a bow and suddenly released in space.

"I didn't even get a word of thanks." He spoke almost as though he was thinking over an old grudge.

He had not forgotten, nor did he want her to forget. He wished her to feel that no memory she had was clearer or more significant than that of their first meeting. He had made her conscious of him even then.

They had come at last to the knock-kneed and short-skirted pines in front of Mr. Richmond's house. Beyond them, in the sudden naked glare, lay the shorn meadows that were studded with small chicken houses; neat tiny dots of utter white out in the open fields that sloped to the South Shore. Ahead was the flash of the Bundys' bright-gilt cupola and a straight road that ran between stone walls and pitched downhill and disappeared. From far off came the slow stroke of the sea.

"It ought to be full tide at Warren's Point," Meg said. It might be cheap of her, but with everybody on the beach it would be fun to startle them by turning up with Dr. Bogert.

"We're not going to Warren's Point," he said; and almost before she knew it, he had turned off the main highway and was driving down a hidden secret lane that ran its bumpy way along the edges of a big salt pond. Suddenly he swerved and there against the skyline was a solid rock foundation that ran up to a masonry of cobblestones. They had reached the desolate, red, ugly house and they had approached it from the rear.

There wasn't any pride at all in coming to it this way. Instead of marching up to it as though they had the right, they had left the car parked out of sight and were walking towards the superintendent's cottage. It had a red tin roof and was unshaded from the sun and built without adornments. Apparently it was their destination.

"It won't do for you to go inside my house," said Dr. Bogert. "Someone might see you going in or out."

Suppose they did? At least a dozen times hadn't she entered Gid's at Bristol after it had been closed and the family had moved to town? Who had thought a thing about her doing it? Certainly not she or Gid. But evidently this was different.

"MacSparran's wife will fix you up with anything you want," Dr. Bogert was explaining. "I wouldn't give my name or let her ask too many questions. In the meantime, I'll be opening up the hamper for our lunch. You'll find me up on the back porch."

CHAPTER XLVI

She was surrounded by a bedroom set of very glossy maple furniture. And she was conversing with a stoutish woman who had high-colored, mottled cheeks and a brown bang damply out of crimp. The woman had sly blue eyes that seemed to have no lids. They would make anybody take a satisfaction in not evading her quick curiosity. Meg had told her who she was and how the family in every sort of sickness had relied on the old doctor and how they felt it was quite natural to continue with his son.

"You don't look as though you ailed much," was the woman's comment.

There was nothing to reply to that. Instead of speaking, Meg surveyed her own image in the mirror of the bureau and began to bush her curly pompadour and then to twist the back part to a figure eight. As she tried to make the coil quite neat and firm, the woman held out a white china saucer towards her.

"Have one," she suggested.

Meg was looking down at a clutter of loose hairpins, some crooked bronze wires and some light-yellow celluloid.

"The ladies always drop them," said the woman. "They leave powder too sometimes. It comes in useful."

"I like my own," Meg said.

"It's not every lady who's so choosy." The queer part was that though the words seemed horrid there was just a hint of something solicitous and motherly about the voice that spoke them, as the woman set the dish of hairpins to one side.

But Meg could feel a stare fixed on her back as she went out the door. Because of it, she was making a deliberate choice between two paths. She knew the path that stare was wondering if she'd take, and instead she was going up a gravel drive that led to the main entrance. There the entrance was at last between two round massive pillars made of cobblestones, and barred off from the highway by heavy links of iron chains.

Far beyond the highway, great reddish sandstone cliffs were stretching out into bold water that was rugged with the crest of waves. The backs of the high cliffs were pale and dry, but their

flanks were dark and seamed with silver that drained off with every wash of surf. On these wide, warm, wooden steps where she had found a seat, she could forget about the woman in the cottage and the saucer that held hairpins and the surreptitious life that it suggested. Here the world was clean with breadth and space and wind and the salt air. It was as clean as the white wing of a passing seagull. She watched each comber spill and break across a distant rock. This was what she'd truly come for. She could stay here and look at this wild scene for hours and hours.

A deep blue shadow, though, was slanting right across the glare.

"I thought that you'd got lost. I told you that you'd find me at the rear." To be heard above the gale Dr. Bogert had to shout.

"You did tell me," she was shouting back. "But I don't like sneaking off and sitting on back porches. It seems furtive."

"Furtive." He spoke the word as though he didn't know exactly what it meant.

Meg could feel him willing her to move and she could feel herself resisting. It became important not to budge. The other ladies, if they liked, could give in to a will that felt that it could order them about by the right of being very masculine. She wasn't going to stir for it or for the strangest sort of pleasure that she felt that there would be in yielding.

Finally he laughed as though he liked her stubbornness.

"All right," he said. "We'll have our lunch out here. But I thought girls liked snug corners."

"I can't stand nooks," Meg said. "Men seem to think that they lead up to things."

"And you don't want the sort of things that they lead up to? You'd rather go on looking at the view?"

"I'd rather go on looking at this view," she said as he sat down on the steps beside her. Then, after a short silence, she went on. "I don't wonder that your father chose this site. It's terrible and beautiful. It must be more terrible and beautiful in a line storm. I'd like to see it in a real September gale."

"No," he said, "you wouldn't. All women hate high weather." His words made Meg recall her visit to his mother, who had sat and rocked with her back to the Atlantic. "All women hate the

ocean except in a dead calm. I suppose that's only natural. It's power unleashed and they're afraid of it."

"I'm not." As Meg spoke, she gazed far off to where a wave was gathering strength and surging up before it broke. "I'd never be afraid of it till I got married. Then I'd just be scared of it because I'd have to think about my children."

In her mind she saw them real as real could be, going wild in a big storm, scrambling far out on the rocks to get a drenching from the spray and venturing too near to the high surf.

"It's not the sort of thing a man would understand. But," she explained, "a woman likes to think about her children squatting safely in a tide pool, being very brown and very busy and believing that they have the run of the whole beach when they haven't really, when they're far away from the breakers and the undertow. Here she would always have to worry."

"I had some pretty narrow shaves myself," he said, "and I can't recall a woman's worrying."

Meg sat still, trying hard to think about him as a little boy. She could see him very straight and very firm and bronzed, careless of bumps and scratches as he prowled all by himself on ledges that were crusted white with barnacles. He must have been intent on getting what he'd set his heart on whether it was a horseshoe crab out in the wash of the high waves or a ribbon of brown kelp that drifted off beyond his reach. Somebody should have worried over him.

She was thinking that when she heard him say quite suddenly, "Funny. I can't think of you somehow as ever having kids."

"Kids." The word itself was like a stab that cut and jabbed with coarse blunt edges. Why, what she meant to have was children; and thinking that she never would was as intimate a thought as anyone could have of her. Besides, Dr. Bogert was quite wrong. If she truly felt like that and if Gid felt like that, then they could count on getting married. Wasn't it the thought of what was natural and complete that kept them separate? "You'd feel cheated. You'd be bound to," she could hear Gid saying. All the same, she wouldn't feel so cheated as she felt cut off from sharing any common life with him.

"Children I could do without." She was really speaking to herself. She could do without them more than other things.

"That was my guess about you," said the voice of Dr. Bogert. And there was a strange insinuation in his voice.

What did he mean? Apparently he wasn't thinking of a quiet day-to-day companionship that would go on and link two lives, but of her right now, a separate person, sitting on his porch in a blue summer dress and warmed through by the sun because she had been singled out by him for company. He was making her aware of him and the immediate moment as he put out a hand and drew her to her feet.

He did mean though to be the nicest sort of host, once he had brought the hamper round to the front porch and set it near a solid rustic table that stood in a sheltered sunny corner. He wanted her to get enjoyment out of all the things she was unpacking; all sorts of things she wasn't used to on a picnic. The two great thermos bottles that fitted in so neatly, even the little salt and pepper pots and china, had a sort of rich completeness that seemed more important than the food.

She was surveying all the furnishings as they sat in their porch chairs and ate the sandwiches that seemed costly too, each in the neatest wrappings of waxed paper.

"I can't imagine you," Meg said, "ever going on our kind of lark." She was thinking of the way that Gid and she had eaten by the roadside, wolfing down their lunch that they had brought in a mere cardboard box. Then because she didn't want to speak of Gid, she went on hastily. "You ought to see the picnic basket that my father uses. Once it was a present with champagne inside. It says Mumm's Extra Dry across one end in big black letters."

"Doesn't your father mind?" Dr. Bogert spoke as though anybody ought to be embarrassed.

"Oh, no," she said. "That's not the sort of thing he minds. He says it makes him feel a little like a belted earl. I don't think, though, that Mother likes the basket very much. She's tried to make him give it up. She says that it's become a major issue and that it's too much for her sense of humor."

"I should think it might be," Dr. Bogert spoke quite grimly.

"I can't see why it matters," Meg began, "not compared with all the fun we have on a real family picnic."

"I never had a family picnic," Dr. Bogert said. "I wouldn't know."

But at least the word "champagne" had started him upon a pleasant, magic train of thought. Once he had found that she had only had the sip that was permissible at weddings, he was planning out a little dinner that he'd like to give her some day in a New York restaurant. The dinner didn't sound so very little and it consisted of a lot of things that she had never heard of. They would have a clear, green turtle soup, then oyster crabs, then breast of guinea hen.

"And after that," he added, "we'd have a salad from the heart of palms."

"You don't really mean," Meg said, "that people cut down a whole palm tree just to make a salad."

But it seemed that they did, and that they didn't care about the years it took and the sort of fight a tree put up to keep on adding to its girth. It could end in being just an extra course served with a special dressing. That wasn't like the end that came to timber that was felled for masts or for the framework of a house or for something that was beautiful and useful. It was an end that only had indignity. But the more she protested, the more Dr. Bogert thought that she was being odd and childish.

"Every single thing I say or do or think is wrong," she heard herself cry out. "I'm not the least bit like those ladies you're so used to. I can't even eat the sort of food they eat, not when it's a salad gouged from a whole tree. I was brought up differently. My father made me feel that growth was sacred. You and your father only spoiled. You spoiled everything that you could shoot or kill or get your hands on. You think it's being sissy not to. You don't want to think of anything as being safe from you."

"I shouldn't wonder but you're right," he said as he moved over and sat close to her. Just in time he had handed her a very cool, clean handkerchief and now his sleeve felt warm against her arm.

Gradually she heard him, telling her of what he thought was sacred. Mating time and breeding time and nesting time. He made her see a single quail that wore a courting crest and the bronze burnish of its new spring plumage and its special sheen. And she could imagine that she saw a clutch of eggs in a ground nest that was almost covered by sere leaves and a covey of young chicks that

tagged the hen through a light undergrowth. Those he never scared or tampered with.

"But you don't care about what happens to them later," she broke in.

"I do care about what happens to them later." He had begun to be impatient. "Women can't seem to understand that a sportsman keeps to his strict rules and that what he most admires is the bird that is the swiftest and the trickiest. Black ducks, for instance. They have all sorts of dodges."

"Why do you want to make them dodge?" she asked. "Why can't you be content to look at them?"

"There's such a thing as skill," he said. "There's such a thing as the enjoyment of it and a decent pride in it. I can't make you understand because you only like to look at things. That seems to be the only one of your five senses that you have developed. However, suppose we give that sense a treat instead of quarreling? Have you ever seen a litter of fine Llewellyn setters? No. Well, when we've finished lunch, I'll give you an eyeful of the kind of beauty that I recognize as beauty. I'll take you out to see my six-month pups."

He was as wrong as wrong could be in thinking that she was getting pleasure only from their active, agile bodies and from the gloss of their white coats that were mottled here and there with black, and from their curved, feathered tails. Now that she was in the kennel-run and the young dogs were bounding up on her, her hand was fingering one velvet floppy ear and then another, or for a moment running down a sun-warmed back or lacing through the softest fringe of fur.

"It's their feel I truly like the best," Meg said. "After that, their eyes. They're just like agate-colored marbles except that they seem so sad and puzzled."

As she spoke, Dr. Bogert was playing with one puppy whose delight in seeing him came out in squirms and wriggles. He had been lightly cuffing its fine head from side to side as it came back at him with sharp, bright teeth.

"Well, my boy," he said. "I'll know more about you when I've let you have a scamper after meadow larks, but you'd better do your puzzling then. You won't have time for much when you

and I start in on serious business. Three days is all you'll have to learn a lot of things that you don't know about."

"What has he got to learn?"

"Pointing and retrieving. I use these dogs for both. This strain is known to all good hunters in Rhode Island. So is my training, too." He spoke with pride. "It takes me just three days to sort out whelps and get rid of those I find are gun-shy."

"Get rid of them?" It sounded ominous. "How," Meg asked, "do you get rid of them?"

"One quick shot," he said, "and it's all over with."

Quickly she stopped playing with a velvet ear.

"If this dog or any other one of them proves gun-shy, I'll find it a good home," she pleaded. "You could give it to me for a pet."

"For a pet." He made the words sound like an insult. "Any of my setters has to know the business that it's bred for or it doesn't stay alive. There's no sense in saving what's no good."

His voice had a hard exultance and a grimness of decision that had no place for pity. Before she knew it, Meg had fled the kennel-run and the sight of all that ardent life that belonged to someone who meant to do all sorts of things with it till it was mastered to obedience. But he had followed her out to the corner of a field and there was a silence that she had to break.

"What business were you bred for? None. Only to be horrible and cruel. I don't know why I'm here with you." The words came surging out.

"You don't?" In his voice there was a threat that made her back away.

But it wasn't any use. There was no place to escape to and in a second she was caught and pinioned so that she couldn't struggle. This was awful to be kissed, kissed fiercely and suddenly in anger as though it was a kind of punishment. Lips were on hers that meant to bruise and hurt and were getting a deep satisfaction out of doing it. A strong hand was on her breast and curved over it like a firm cup and fitted tightly to it. Though she shut her eyes, she had to know the glint of eyes that were too close to hers and the texture of a skin that pressed hard against her own.

Worst of all was a feeling that she'd never felt. Something was being willfully destroyed for good and all. It was a very private

thing that she had meant to give to Gid, not to anybody else. In its place and quite against her will, there was a warm flow of contentment at no longer being so untouched and separate a person. Whatever this might be, it was being close to someone and not all alone.

"Are you sure now why you came?" Dr. Bogert asked as he released her slowly and she leaned against the high stone wall.

"Yes," she said. "I came because I'm bad like all those women that I've read about. I feel exactly like them."

"Bad." He spoke as though he didn't understand. "Let's say you're only young and human."

"No," Meg said. "I'm not just young and human. If I were, you'd be my age and this would be right because it led to somewhere. But it doesn't. It can't lead anywhere. That's what's so wrong about it."

"But you knew that all along," his voice cut in.

"I suppose I did." Her thoughts were travelling backwards to the reason why she had come. "I came," she said, "because I got so tired of loving someone whom I had to love from a safe distance; of knowing that I'd have to do it all my life. I'm no good at wanting and not getting and being sure that I can't ever hope to have my wish. It only drives me to seek out someone who's the very opposite."

"So I'm the very opposite. I didn't feel so for a minute." As he leaned against the wall beside her, handsome and strong and powerful, she could feel him wondering who the very opposite must be; a man for whom he'd have contempt.

"You don't wish good things to happen to me"—she spoke in a low voice—"and nothing that you wouldn't play some part in. You think of me as prey, just the way you think of ducks, only that I haven't got their tricks and dodges. You didn't have to spend three days in breaking in a good retriever to come after me. I don't believe I even could have furnished you much sport."

"Look here," he asked, "do you have to take things quite so seriously? I did only what was natural, didn't I?"

She was gazing at a clump of flesh-pink milkweed, one flat tuft of which was covered by the outspread wings of a copper-colored butterfly that stayed there in a sort of drugged content. Danaeus

Arcippus. Somehow to know its name had become tremendously important. It was important, too, to know that it came from a pale green chrysalis that hung pendant from that one variety of plant. It lived and it fed hungrily on that, no other. There were facts that it made her understand.

"Yes," Meg said. "You were doing only what was natural to you. And I guess I must have known I was inviting it. It's worst of all to feel that it was natural to me too; that that's the kind of woman that I am."

She could feel the panic in her voice, and to save her life she couldn't help it.

"I don't want to be that kind," she said. "I wish," she begged, "that you would take me home."

"I'll drive you home," he said, "and we'll drive according to your rules. But before we leave this place, I'd like to tell you something. You're not hurt. Some day that opposite of mine—and I expect that I can guess his name—some day he may have good reason to be grateful to me. He seems never to have roused you to the faintest sense of passion as a possibility."

But passion was a word in a French novel. It didn't happen to nice women. And it was scary and far off and no more real than a tornado that was a storm which happened only in a foreign country.

"He'd be ashamed to make me feel like that," Meg said.

"Would he? That seems a waste," said Dr. Bogert, "when you have the instinct for it. I knew that when I kissed you. Why I let you off so easily, I can't imagine. Next time I won't against that sort of rival. I've given you fair warning."

"There won't be a next time." As Meg spoke, she scuffed her shoe against a piece of turf until it bared a patch of warm, brown earth.

"Sure of that?" he teased.

No. She wasn't sure. Suppose she had the chance again of not feeling quite so separate, of being swept away as only part of a fierce force? That could happen, and yielding to it would be easier and easier because it seemed so simple.

"I'd much rather marry Harold Hammond and be safe from you," she said.

"No," he said. "You wouldn't. That I don't have to worry over."

Suddenly back came the memory of a yellow-mustard field that she and Gid had skirted and of a sun-warmed rock that had been patched with orange lichen, and of a talk that they had had without so much as touching hands. But back also came the memory of the utter loneliness she'd felt as she had walked back to the Jastrums' house.

Wasn't any sort of life with Harold Hammond better than that loneliness? An engagement to him ought to make her know.

"If it doesn't work," she said, "there's one thing I can do. I can go on to New York and earn my living. You couldn't spoil that for me."

"No?" he asked. "Why couldn't I, with New York not very far away?"

"Because you've never touched my mind," she said. "You've never come within a million miles of understanding it. We've never had a single thought in common."

"Your mind." He laughed. "If we've reached the point of talking about that, we might as well be starting home."

CHAPTER XLVII

Some day soon, when she really got engaged to Harold Hammond, she would have to tell him about Dr. Bogert and her trip to Little Compton. That was in the code for girls. Every little thing they'd done, they must confess and be forgiven for. They must be shriven. And she couldn't be like other girls, who for a test of love or because they felt their lives had been too vacant of adventure, made up little tales and told them. She would have to come out with the shameless truth.

But not right now. Not while she was visiting Harold's sister with him. Her burden she was free of till she got back home.

In the meantime, Boston seemed so safe. All this afternoon as they had prowled around the streets near Beacon Hill, she hadn't had to think of seeing a big, gleaming Packard car and encounter-

ing Dr. Bogert's glance that surveyed her and at the same time reminded her of what he knew about her. She was safer than she was in her own house where she had to meet him constantly as Grandma Simmons's doctor and to carry out his orders or go downstairs with him before he left and get his last instructions. Into every word he put significance and made her feel that the attraction held.

No place, though, seemed so secure a refuge from all she was afraid of as this where she was sitting with Harold Hammond close beside her. Nothing could happen to her here in Boston's Symphony Hall.

They had come so early that Meg had been aware of dim, gilt balconies and deep red plush and dark red walls from two of which a row of graven, classic, rather dingy figures looked down, each standing in a nave-shaped niche.

Now the too deep length was filling up with people, and they didn't look as though they'd come to see a woman dance. Probably they really had turned out to hear the orchestra that was their very own and that for this once, as Meg knew her father'd say, was cutting didoes. The atmosphere was cold with a suspended judgment. There seemed to be unsurety about this orchestra's accompanying any dancer; least of all one with a foreign reputation. Isadora Duncan, whoever she might be, had ventured here as an invader. Everywhere about were the most immaculate white gloves, so many that they gave out a separate and distinguishable scent of recent gasoline, but Meg could not imagine them as clapping with a loud, spontaneous applause.

Down the aisle were coming men with eagle Emersonian faces. At least they bore a trace of that high lineage. They still had the air of isolation that prevented them from seeming part of any huddled herd.

It was the older women, though, who were the most impressive. They made Meg think of days when she had resented being "only clean." In them, however, cleanness went much deeper than the severity with which they had combed back their well-brushed, manelike hair and bound it up with no attempt at softening frizzy prettiness. It went deeper than the frankly natural surface of their faces that let the etching show without a trace of rouge or even

rice powder. It was a sort of inner cleanness that came from knowing that black wasn't white and recognizing no gradations in between.

If she only lived in Boston, maybe she could grow old like them and learn to be "an amiable consort." Maybe she wouldn't have to be so awfully amiable. Not if she could judge by the profiles of the ladies sitting near her. All at once they made her understand the signs above the doors on the many sober public buildings she had passed this afternoon. "For the furtherance of" or "For the prevention of" the signs had read. "But who wants to further or prevent?" she had asked Harold. Now she knew. Never had she seen so many clear-cut and determined profiles that would be exactly right to reproduce upon some badge as the emblem of a cause.

"It's your sister whom I'd really want to be like," Meg said to Harold, who was studying a pinkish program. She could see that he was pleased; and what she said was true.

"If you go to spend the night beneath her roof—" Meg had taken in that warning of her mother's— "Mrs. Brimmer has every right to think you are engaged or mean to be."

Mrs. Brimmer might think so, but hadn't her welcome been most formal and most gracious, the sort of welcome that was right to give to a young girl who stayed with her as a guest and to whom her brother wished to show an evening's courtesy? She hadn't made Meg feel committed or given her the slightest hint of other than an interest in her comfort, in her shell-pink evening dress, in her confidence that her whole appearance was exactly right and not noticeable in the least. Not to be noticeable was, apparently, the greatest compliment; and it had been given in a voice that made distance seem not hostile, but desirable.

Well, it would not be hard to be as dignified and reticent as Mrs. Brimmer if one could move about in spacious rooms like hers; rooms that depended for their beauty on a cool austerity. It was impossible to think of people dwelling in them without a decorous control of every thought and act and without a valuation of the sense of privacy. No one could just happen into any room without violating the set, simple lovely lines that had been intended for a formal, gradual approach.

"I hoped that we might get some Beethoven," Meg heard Harold say. "I can't find him on the program."

If she pretended that she was searching, too, he wouldn't guess that she was busy with a question more important.

How were they two going to live together? However in the world? One mistake she had made already. She had made it carelessly. "That's the one place that I'd truly like to own," she'd said. At the time, they had been in Providence and passing an abandoned place on College Hill. She had meant what she had said. She had always loved those special grounds for their wide terraces, and for a maze of box and for a deserted flower bed where every June, the Oriental poppies managed to work through the weeds and burst into a blaze. She had loved to think of the high view that the front windows must command of the outspread city far below them. And she had been drawn to a certain comfortable look of warmth and intimacy about the house itself. But later when Harold had told her that he had actually bought it and had the deed right in his pocket, hadn't she felt a sharp dismay? Unconsciously she had thought about it as a house she meant to share with Gid who would come straying through it and who would never be far out of call.

What she shared with Harold should be huge, so huge that she should have quarters that were recognized as hers.

Not that she didn't mean to give full measure to the man beside her who was now drawing her attention to a special number on the pinkish program.

"Marche Militaire," he spoke with emphasis. "No ballerina in the world could hope to pirouette to that."

Music she would have to get to work and learn about when she had habitually thought of it as an oasis for her in the general conversation. When people who did know about it got into a discussion, she had depended on her ignorance to keep her in a cool, still, silent place. Art would be more difficult for her to handle because she did like Moderns; the very ones that Harold hated; Manet and Monet and Cezanne who he said should each be given a good thorough spanking and then be sent to school and taught to draw before they dared to touch a brush. And Literature. How was she going to deal with that? Go to the Shakespeare Club

with Harold and speak the lines that were assigned to her and not care too much about their meaning. Read out loud to Harold in the evenings; read Winston Churchill's "noble" novels and be moved by them. Go to the theatre and be deeply moved by plays like *The Stranger in the House* and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. Never mention that young playwright, Edward Sheldon, whose *Salvation Nell* had been too much even for Providence. Melodramatic it had been, and it had dealt with slums and not the drawing room. But how vividly she could still see Mrs. Fiske clad in a "lassie's" uniform. And how clearly she could hear her saying, "That was the only time when we was really happy." When Mrs. Fiske had said that to the Bowery tough who was so outrageously the hero of a play supposed to satisfy a cultivated audience, something had rung true and clear.

Thoughts such as that she would have to keep all to herself, Meg knew. But the cherishing protection she would get would compensate for silence. She wasn't going to marry Harold only for his money and position. Cousin Belle might think so, but it wasn't true. Other girls might want the butlers and the liveried footmen and the silver service and a big brick mansion with twin copper beeches. But her motive, so Meg felt, was different. She would be shielded from herself and the terrifying badness that was in her. The horrid instinct that Dr. Bogert had said she had for passion, she was going to kill for good and all. She might be scared in other ways, but never in that way again.

The orchestra by now had lined the stage, leaving the center bare and the musicians were all tuning up with squeaks and screams and pulings of soft sound. Muck, the great and arrogant conductor, had come in and had taken possession of his orchestra as though he felt his power supreme and safe from insurrection. Then, slipping past the men who were caressing their bass viols and their cellos, came a young girl—so at least she seemed—and she was standing all alone well towards the front of the cleared empty space.

If she was a dancer, where were her tulle bouffant skirts, the kind that Degas painted? Where were her stub-toed ballet slippers, the kind that Degas painted, too, making them lace criss-cross around stout muscular calves? This tall, slim girl was bare-legged even to her thighs. She was bare-footed, too, and wore only the scantiest of

chiffon tunics of a light blue misty color. Her smooth, simply-parted hair was held in place by the narrowest of silver fillets; and as she bowed and smiled and clasped her hands across her breasts, which were distinct and separate and small, she looked demure. Not prim, but demure. She might be Wordsworth's "Lucy" of his favorite simple poems.

No, she was not "a violet by a mossy stone." Nor was she "a star when only one is shining in the sky." But she did belong to Wordsworth.

"'The beauty born of murmuring sound.' It has passed into her face," Meg said to Harold. "But most of all it's passed into her body."

Never mind if "body" was a word that "a little lady" was not supposed to use.

Harold hadn't heard it, for he was muttering something about a desecration of the Boston Symphony and a most egregious insult to intelligence and taste.

At any rate he wouldn't dare to rise and leave, and make a girl conspicuous by following him up a long aisle. He would never do that here, watched by a Boston audience of which he stood in awe.

Suddenly Meg heard the tap of the conductor's baton and saw it lift.

At once there were overtones and undertones that seemed like shivering wind, sighs in tall sedges. The light, misty tunic fluttered with them. Then as the oboes and the flutes caught up a melody, the tunic fluttered tremulously, uncertainly, as though unsure of whether to unfold. But soon it might have been a chrysalis cast off by a light butterfly that spread its wings to a warm sun for the first time. What little darting signs of joy and of discovery, what harmony of sound were blended into a companionship! Then as the violins began a lovely search through silence, the spirit Meg was watching began to drift and dance and pause and drift again more gaily and more gaily. It had no relation to the earth although it too was searching.

In a flash, Meg knew what it was seeking. It would come contentedly to rest if it could find a flesh-pink tuft of milkweed in a sunny meadow. It had taken her back to a pasture down at Little Compton and she was reckoning with a passionate instinct in her-

self as she watched a blossom covered and uncovered by the beat of wings that opened wide with utter satisfaction and then slowly closed.

Was she never to forget a single thing that happened to her? Even one she hated to remember? Other people seemed to. For them, time apparently erased so many memories or made them so unreal that they might have chanced to someone else. But for her a recollection kept the instant's piercing sharpness. She still felt as she had felt, with no diminishment in her response.

Since that was so, it behooved her to be very careful how she moved through life. What would happen to her if she deliberately invited what filled her with distaste, with a physical aversion that made her shudder even in anticipation?

Harold hadn't noticed that she had edged away from him and was sitting very separately in her stiff seat.

On the stage a transformation had occurred. The butterfly had vanished and in its place, there was a wild Bacchante with her bare, gleaming body ivory white against tight, scanty swathings of nasturtium red. There was no happiness in that fierce woman with her head bent forward. She was possessed with a desire to kill, to take delight in killing with a wild exultancy. She might be mad, but she had a clarity of purpose that was terrifying. So one would deal with a violation of one's self and an outrage of its secrecies. The retribution for that outrage would be savage death.

This Harold hadn't sensed at all. He was talking of his own disgust and his own innate sense of decency; and he was offering a most profound apology for bringing any girl to witness what he called a spectacle of shame.

But there was no shame in the advancing figure that was now striding on the stage to the first triumphant blasts of the *Marche Militaire*. It was striding to the tumult of the whole full orchestra. Then long-drawn and deeply penetrating, the cellos rose above the tumult. They had grown strident and had taken on an accent of command. The blare of the trombones was answering them; and with a deep magnificence and resonance, the contra-basses were accompanying them. Group by group the instruments were building up vast shapes of power. But their shapes never reached the power expressed in that disdainful head and in those strong

sinewy limbs that strode with a proud conquering contempt until they shook the hall and made it throb with the firm tread of feet. The trumpets and bassoons were pouring forth a jubilation of defiance. Yet more primitive in pride was that marching figure on the platform. Was it some trick of lights that magnified it in its arrogance? It proclaimed itself as far beyond approach or capture and dominated even the deep pulse and throb of sound.

And what the sight of it was doing to her, Meg didn't want to have it do. Better to be softly pliant when to be so, meant protection. Wiser not to venture. Yet suddenly it was as though she felt a tug that was too strong for her. Something in her had been liberated. She was free of certain terrors that she'd had to live with in these recent years.

For a woman's body wasn't what she had been told it was. It had glad, sacred rights that were its own, and passion was among them. It should not be cheated of those rights even when its instincts and desires were dangerous. The matter was as simple as just that. It was so simple that what was there but one choice?

"Now for the Blue Danube." As Harold spoke his voice showed his relief. "Even Duncan can't do much with a Strauss waltz except keep time to it."

Nothing ought to follow that last furious, feverish revelation, but perhaps Isadora Duncan meant to still the tumult that she had provoked.

Once more the girl of Wordsworth's Lucy Poems, a tall girl who seemed demure, was standing towards the front of the cleared stage.

And "the beauty born of murmuring sound" was in the fluid movements of her long slim arms as they began to stir and ripple. And it was in the fluid movement of her legs as her knees began to lift, first one and then the other, raised as a tide of rhythm came up to them from her lightly dancing feet.

If Meg had never laid her eyes on the Blue Danube, at least she had seen the Narragansett Bay, had seen it all her life in every sort of weather. This was the Bay on a calm day when only the surface rippled with the breeze and when white caps ruffled the small waves that came prancing in towards shore. And this was it in a more dangerous mood when intermittent puffs came out of

nowhere and blew straight across it, churning it at first, then raising deeper crests and making deeper furrows. Now a strong gust had come, a strengthening, whirling gale that stirred up foam, blew it back, and tore it into tatters. A squall could be like this, a mad gay senseless rush of wind that set even a safe harbor rocking. Yet all the while the tide kept steadily to its own beat. Even when the squall had died away, there was the rise and fall and rise and fall that were the continuous motion of the sea.

As the pouring flood of sound dipped back and died away, Meg knew that in her thoughts she had been back at Little Compton and gazing at a scene that she had called wild and terrible and beautiful. Near her had been a man who had been dangerous to every instinct in her. Yet if she could, she would go back despite what would be sure to follow. And she would be as wrong as wrong could be in doing it. She couldn't even say to him "that was the only time when we were really happy." Not for an instant had they been really happy with each other. Deep down, what had they felt but confusion and contempt for each other's way of life?

She needn't think about that conflict now, for on the stage the girl was bowing, clasping her arms across her small, firm breasts, and bending her head low as she stood acknowledging the thunderous applause. On every side, white gloves were clapping madly. And not only men, but women, too, even those with the determined profiles, had risen to their feet.

Not Harold though. He had held up Meg's evening wrap for her methodically and then reached for his hat and coat. Once they had made their way up the long aisle, he was suggesting that they stroll a little in the cool night air. A stroll, he said, might help him voice his most profound apologies.

"Apologies for what?" Meg asked. Then with a new bravery, she was continuing. "If you hadn't taken me I never would have known a woman's body was so wonderful."

With his silk white muffler showing well above his collar, he was walking by Meg's side and protesting his distaste.

"That is not the sort of spectacle," he said, "to which a man exposes a young girl; surely not the girl he means to make his wife."

Now was as good a time as any other for a test of honesty and courage. Quickly Meg was standing with her back braced firm against a lamp-post. Like a prop she felt it through her evening cloak, very rigid, stiff and firm.

"Harold, I'm not going to be your wife," she said. "I truly thought I was. That's why I'm here in Boston with you. You don't suppose that I'd be visiting your sister unless I meant to show you that I felt committed? You don't think I would have gone on taking and accepting all your presents if I'd meant to lead you on for nothing? But I simply can't go through with it. After what I've learned tonight, you'd be awfully sorry if I did."

"How could I know," he was protesting, "that I was taking you to see a shameless hussy. I depended on the Boston Symphony."

"She's not a shameless hussy," Meg was contradicting him. "Can't you see that's just the trouble with us? You think she was outrageous and indecent. I think she was magnificent. We're as far apart as that."

Even with the street light overhead, it was too dark for Meg to see his upper lip, but she was sure that it was trembling. Worst of all, he was making every allowance that he could think of, for her. She was overheated by the crowded auditorium. She was unused to such an exposé—which seemed a horrid word. She was overwrought by it and not herself, which was quite natural. She would recover her composure when they got back to his sister's. . . .

Probably she would and that was just the trouble. To have sufficient courage, she would have to have things out right here while she had an honest lamp-post firm against her back.

"Harold, you don't know me," she began. "You don't know anything about me. You've only seen me as Miranda; the kind of girl you wanted me to be. And I'm not like that at all. Of a sudden I'm possessed as though a devil entered into me. For no reason, I can do the wildest sort of things."

"The wildest sort of things." He stood there scorning her confession. "Wild, perhaps in your imagination."

"No," she said, "they're not in my imagination. I did go off and spend a day alone with the wrong sort of man, the sort you hate to have me bow to. I went because I liked the danger of it. If you think that's bad, I'm bad. He kissed me, too, and I don't believe it

was his fault. He did only what was natural to him. And if I liked to have him kiss me, that was only natural to me too. That's the sort I am."

At last she had made Harold listen to her.

"I didn't want to be that sort. I hated being it," she added. "And I did think if you protected me, that I could be the kind of wife you'd like to have me be. I thought that I could change into a different person. Truly, I believed that I could learn to stand things."

"Stand things? What sort of things?" His voice was filled with his bewilderment.

"Like marrying and having children. I did mean to do it well," Meg said. "I meant to be a credit to you. I wasn't going to skimp or cheat. I'm not cheating now. I'm giving up a lot I'd like to have and that everybody'd like to see me get. Besides," she added, "I'm scared to death of what I'm going to do."

"You mean marrying that other man?" he asked.

"No," she said. "He's not the kind that thinks of marriage. And if he did, I don't believe he'd think of me. You'd put up with all the Baileys and the Simmonses and be so kind and generous to them. You'd respect my father. You wouldn't mind my father's being a professor and hunting for sabatia and not ducks and all the hundred little things he does. You'd go right on respecting his distinction. There are so many ways in which you're truly good. The other man's not good, not at least in any kind of life I know about."

"And yet you're going to keep on seeing him?"

"No," Meg said. "I'm not going to keep on seeing him. I'm going to get away from Providence. I'm going to New York to earn my living somehow. I can't go on like this, pretending and pretending that I fit when I don't fit anywhere. It's time I left and stood on my own feet and stopped accepting when everything I take just makes me falser. I've got to go even though I hurt my mother and my father."

"Don't you think that you've hurt me?" Harold's voice reproached her.

"Yes," she said. "But from the very first I told you that I couldn't be Miranda. I don't want to be a hussy and I hope I

won't be. But what I truly am is something that I've got to learn about all by myself. I need freedom to find out."

Harold at last had hailed a roving taxi; and in silence they were driving down a long broad street that led to his sister's stately house on Beacon Hill.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Of all unlikely people, it was Grandpa Simmons who had provided the money that Meg was going to need for her departure.

A little money, even just a scrap that she could call her own, she had to have before she could announce her plans for leaving Providence. And from somewhere in her mind, a memory had come back.

It was of a little girl who had been spooning oatmeal from a silver porringer set in the middle of a scarlet lacquered waiter that had been put before her on the breakfast table. Not very often, maybe once a week, she had heard a knock at the front door; and provided that she'd nearly finished, she had been allowed to get down from her chair with a sense of great importance. Then, all alone, she had gone the length of the front hall and finally had reached and turned a doorknob that had been level with her head.

Outdoors, on the stoop and waiting for her patiently, had stood her grandfather. In those days he had been living on Benevolent Street which was further from her house even than college. Too far to go to in her tricycle, it had seemed miles and miles away.

"Why, it's you, Grandpa," she'd called out as though at that early hour it couldn't be, not possibly.

"I was just passing by," he'd said. "I'm on my way down street to make a dollar."

In those days that had seemed to her a big amount for anybody's services.

"When you get it, can I see it?" she had always asked because a dollar was so new and shiny and he made a single one sound dreadfully important.

"Most of it," he said, "I have to carry home to Grandma, but

there's a single quarter left for you; and that I put into the Savings Bank."

"That's no fair," she'd said, "not if I don't ever see it."

It was at that point, she could remember, that he'd reached down in his waistcoat pocket and had drawn out a narrow, pale brown book that had fitted very tightly in an envelope. "There's your whole full name written right across the top," he'd pointed out. "Some day when you're a great, grown girl of twenty-one you'll have a little sum of money that will come in handy. Now do I get my kiss?"

Hasty and perfunctory enough had been the thanks that he'd received; not like the thanks she gave for presents that she could unwrap from tissue and then gaze upon and handle.

It was only recently that she had learned how bit by bit that sum had been stored up for her.

However had he managed it? He'd done it long after the big Simmons failure; years after he had sold his mill and had refused to be responsible again for a single cent belonging to another person. In those days when Grandpa must have walked far out of his way "to just pass by" and then had gone "down street to make a dollar," he had made that dollar in complete humility. He had stooped to being a mere cotton-weigher in the rich office of the Hazards and the Chapins, once his own competitors. Small enough must have been the weekly wages that he'd carried home to Grandma; so small that Meg had to wonder how he'd had enough to buy the big Thanksgiving turkey which he'd made a family affair and from which, with an old-fashioned courtesy, he had carved two neat, thin, crispy slivers off the breast for "Mrs. Simmons" before he had helped anybody else.

But sure enough. It wasn't her imagination. When Meg had mustered up her courage to go into the Savings Bank and ask for one of the tellers whom she knew, she had been shown into an office walled with glass and had then been faced with solemn interviews and cards and signatures. But she had finally been given the very same small book that Grandpa had once carried for her in his waistcoat pocket. When he moved on to New York for that brief, unhappy stay, he had left it in safe-keeping. There it was and on the outside cover was her whole full name. Inside, column

after column were the tiniest entries, too tiny for the trip it must have cost each time to have them put there. However, with the long accumulated interest, there was a balance of one hundred dollars and a little more. It belonged to her; nobody else.

And there wasn't any way to thank that gentle presence who was like a whole Beatitude said softly. What had there ever been that she could do for him except to beg the favor of a stubby pencil or a thin yellowing sheet of writing paper or to sit by his side sometimes in the Beneficent Church or to ask him questions about the Mosaic Law?

When he found that she had gone away for good, he would trust her to God's keeping. His faith would be as simple as just that.

Not so Grandma Simmons, who had no trust at all; who had seen "the righteous forsaken and their seed begging bread"; and who had watched them swallow down the charity she hated, for almost all her lifetime. She'd think that Meg was traipsing off again to get mixed up with still more foreigners and that she herself was the only one with common sense enough to fret.

However, that was not so hard to think about as Grandma in her little sacque going down the hallway to look for pear trees in full bloom, or for hazel nuts that gleamed among a drift of autumn leaves in back of the old Simmons Homestead, or getting out the old plush family album and wanting so to talk about "the Senator" and the pictures of the other people in their faded frameworks. In the end, it was Grandmother herself who gave the clue of how to act.

Long ago when she had moved on to New York, what had she done but steal away without a single word because she couldn't bring herself to say good-bye to a child who had depended on her? All the same she'd gone, although she must have known that she'd been needed terribly. Stronger than love, stronger than compassion had been the healthy vigorous desire for some new life of her own. No matter how that venture had turned out, her desire had been compelling. Now it was the other way about. Grandma had become the child who'd feel abandoned; and it was Meg who'd have to steal away without a word.

Not, though, without whatever help she could muster. Sup-

pose that she forgot about herself and her avoidance? Whom did Grandmother adore as much as Dr. Bogert? And to her, he wasn't ever quick or curt or even teasing. He sat down by her bed and let her talk and talk about old days and tell him that he needn't hope to be as good a doctor as his father. For some reason he had endless patience with her. He'd look after her and encourage her to prattle on about the past.

Since her trip with him to Little Compton, Meg had tried to dodge encounters when she could. But now she was waiting to waylay him in the parlor when he came downstairs from his professional call.

There, against the wall with its paper faded to the loveliest mellow apple green, hung the gilt mirror with a landscape and with an overhanging row of small gilt balls. And on the old Hepplewhite chair below, were his fall overcoat and derby hat. But it was one of his heavy dogskin gloves that seemed suddenly so very personal. Even lying idle and upturned and empty, it kept the imprint of the hand that fitted into it. She knew that powerful brown hand that moved with no waste motion in the wrist socket. She could see fingers that had neat, blunt nails and were a little spread and thickened at the knuckles. That hand had touched her intimately with a touch that became a part of her whole consciousness and that nothing could erase. To escape from it, was the silliest reason to be leaving Providence. But though she felt the need to use her mind and to win her independence, she knew to her shame that the other reason was the strongest of them all.

"I had to see you," she began as the doctor came into the room and, unconscious of her, started to pick up his things.

"Had to see me?" As he straightened up and turned, he was smiling as though she'd paid him a great compliment. "I thought you liked to do things casually," he said.

"This time I don't. I want to beg you to look after Grandma. Till she gets used to my not being here, I'm afraid she's going to miss me awfully."

"Miss you? You'll be dropping in to see her."

"No, I won't be dropping in," Meg said. "I can't when I'm going off to earn my living in New York."

This time, she'd made him serious. First he sat down in the

armchair. Then he took out a cigarette, lit it, and between thin wisps of smoke looked at it thoughtfully.

"So," he spoke at last, "the Hammond fortune hasn't proved to be enough of an inducement. I don't suppose I thought it would be. It would require dishonesty of a sort I don't believe you could assume. All the same, I don't know that I like to think about your heading for New York alone. Even now, you're not exactly what I'd call one of those women of experience that you say that I'm so used to. In knocking round to look for jobs, you'll have to meet a lot of men of one sort or the other. They'll be mostly of the other."

Surely he wasn't quite the one to sit there giving her advice on that subject.

"It won't matter if they're mostly of the other, will it? Not when I've learned better than to go off all alone to spend the day with one of them?"

It seemed odd that that taunt shouldn't make him angry, but very silently he sat considering it.

"Funny," he finally remarked almost as though he were alone and speaking to himself. "Funny if I'd served an educational purpose. That hasn't been my role exactly, but I must have played it rather well."

Then quickly his gray eyes had narrowed and his mood had changed to one of bantering.

"I rather think that my reward should be that little dinner in a New York restaurant, provided I leave out the heart of palm-tree salad."

This time she had him exactly where she wanted him. He belonged only in a world that was luxurious and extravagant, even a little showy.

"I'll be living in the slums," she said, "right in the very thick of them. I'd like to see you calling for me at a Settlement House."

"So would I," he answered quickly. "So I daresay would many other people here in Providence. I could name a few who'd take a train trip for a front seat at the show. That's an inducement in itself. Not that it's the primary one. In a way I feel responsible. Though you have a mind that I can't hope to touch or understand, I'd like to know how the honest working-girl was getting on."

"You're not responsible," Meg said. "Whatever made you think you were?"

"If I'm no more important than all that, the proof of it would be the little dinner with me in a New York restaurant. How about it?"

He was daring her to make it seem significant by a refusal. When she had agreed to it indifferently, he crossed the room and slipped into his overcoat. Then he returned until his closeness had a kind of imminence. As she rose, she felt him standing very near.

He might be kissing her again by reason of what he made her think about. She wasn't in the parlor of her house. She was in a sunny pasture down at Little Compton and, with no will of her own, she was responding to desire.

"Good-bye," he said, but to her relief he was holding out his hand most formally. "Here's luck to living in the slums. You're bound to like them better than a lot of footmen and some other men that we won't mention. I'll take care of your grandmother and store up all her insults to me and recount them to you in New York."

Off he had gone without getting her address so that she didn't need to worry. All the same she had a deep presentiment that their acquaintance—for it wasn't friendship surely—wasn't going to end like this.

Now that she had gone so far in her decision, the next step was to tell her mother of the plans she'd made so carefully. As Meg started off in search of her, she was reminded of those trudges that as a child she'd taken from one room to another, looking for someone who'd responded gaily and so carelessly to demands on her attention. "Just a moment, Darling," she could hear her mother saying as she'd slipped out of a door and disappeared from sight. And how surprised and affectionate and inattentive she had been when at last she had been found.

That was the way she'd be today. But there were also other things to think about. In the last few weeks when Meg had thought about herself as Mrs. Hammond with an allowance of her very own, one of the few pleasures that she'd had, had been in considering the different ways in which she could refurbish these familiar rooms.

Stair carpets like the one she was ascending had been among the first things that she'd meant to tend to. This had been turned and turned again and taken up each fall and cleaned and beaten. Now it reproached her with white patches showing in its dark green grain.

If she was ever to be free, she had to shake off its reproach and that of the hall paper that was so faded that it was impossible to trace the pattern. But, thank heaven, once she had turned into the bedroom, she knew that there was nothing she could ever hope to do about the Manly-Bailey desk.

In a bedroom it was quite as out of place as the guinea pig had once been in the bathroom. It belonged in the State Capitol, not here. But its massive, monumental bulk and heavy glossy wood were indestructible. So, too, were the energy and valor of the woman who was sitting at it, working on another one of those commercial textbooks that had won big contracts and kept the family afloat.

"Mother," Meg began, "I think I've simply got to talk to you."

"Do, Dear," her mother said. "I'm only copying a passage from a book and I can listen to you perfectly."

Meg sat down staring at a slim straight back and unstooped shoulders and braided loops of hair that was still the loveliest palest gold.

"I ought to tell you that I've planned to leave," Meg started off. "You ought to know I'm going to go away."

"Of course you are." As her mother spoke, she took down another book, glanced in it, then kept on writing. "Happily for us, we'll have you very near. And I can't see you being driven round by a chauffeur. You're just the sort of girl who'll have a car all of your own and who'll learn to drive it easily. Before you know it, you'll drive well enough to whisk your father off to all his favorite haunts, places that he hasn't seen for years. He'll behave just like a boy. He'll simply love it."

This had to stop. Much too vividly to be endured, Meg could see her father seated eagerly beside her on the front seat of a run-about, gazing at a countryside that he so seldom saw these days, choosing the back country roads that he'd often walked when he'd gone tramping by himself or with a group of botanists. He'd find a

special pleasure in having her slow down and stop while he admired the bark or foliage of some special tree.

"If you'd only listen to me once," Meg said in desperation. "I won't be whisking Father off to all his favorite haunts. I won't be owning any car. I won't even be in Providence."

Even those blunt, downright words had only gained a half-attention.

"Why won't you be in Providence? Of course you'll be." Her mother had confidently answered her own question. "I'd feel quite differently if you were marrying a man from out of town. But you'll be moving down the Bay in summertime and back again in fall."

"You see only what you want to see. You haven't time to notice other things." Now was the time for Meg to summon up her courage. "I don't suppose you've noticed that Harold hasn't been here at the house since I got back from Boston. He hasn't been here for a week."

This time Meg had made her mother turn and speak with apprehension in her voice.

"He could have had to take a business trip," she said. "Men do, who aren't professors."

"Harold hasn't had to take a business trip. He's here in town," Meg said. "But I had to tell him that I couldn't marry him. I couldn't do it and play fair. There wasn't any use in trying and if I started in to tell you why, I'd only get embarrassed and ashamed."

"You sound as though we might be miles and miles apart." Her mother spoke with a deep, hurt bewilderment.

"But we won't be if I go away," Meg hurried on. "That's one reason why I'm going to New York. It may turn out to be the most important reason. I can't feel close to you because I can't be honest while I'm always and forever taking what you work so hard to give me. It's bound to make a difference when I get a job."

"A job. That's what I've prayed you'd never have to get," her mother said. "I've been so happy thinking that you wouldn't. I saved enough to give you this free year in the hope that you might never have to. And everything was turning out exactly as I planned."

"It isn't as I planned."

"Why not?" her mother asked. "Harold's good. He's generous and kind. And he's offering you the kingdoms of the world; a share in his at any rate."

"You didn't marry for a share in any kingdom," Meg protested stoutly.

"No, Dear, -of course I didn't," came the answer quickly. "I was too young to have a grain of sense. Why, I was so young that I regarded my first home as a darling little kind of dollhouse, all filled with sun and with a canary trilling at the parlor window. I couldn't even cook and I used to bake your father oysters on the Franklin grate. He must have swallowed quarts of them quite cheerfully."

"Harold would never swallow quarts of anything I baked quite cheerfully."

"No, Dear. No one but your father would," her mother said. "And even he sometimes used to quote something out of Dickens about an oyster's looking too much like a baby's ear. He stopped quoting it when we had an infant of our own. Then he was so vain that he behaved as though no other man had ever had a child. He made a whole parade out of one baby-carriage if I let him wheel it on the street." At the memories she recalled, her face grew wistful. "That," she went on, "was when I started to grow up and take things seriously. Mellon's food and croup and cholera infantum and only a little Irish greenhorn, Beazie, to share in the responsibility, what with your Grandma Simmons three whole blocks away. That's not the sort of life you'd have to face with Harold. You'd never have to learn to bake or cook or grub. And when the children came, there'd be night-nurseries and day-nurseries and French bonnes in caps with streamers, trailing in and out of doors with real perambulators."

"That's not the kind of world I want," Meg begged. "It isn't what I'm fitted for."

"But you were the little girl who wanted so to have a greenhouse in the family. Now that it's waiting for you, all filled up with palms and red poinsettia, why should you want to throw the chance away?"

Why? Was there ever but one reason?

"I don't love Harold, Mother. There's nothing that I love about him."

"In time there would be, though. You've never had a chance at luxury. You've no idea of what it does to smooth things over."

"I can't bear to have things smoothed for me that way," Meg said. "I'd rather stand on my own feet."

"You seem to think that standing on your feet is easy and it truly isn't, Darling." Mother was alarmed enough to talk about herself if she could be persuasive. "For a woman, it's no fun to work. It isn't really, even when she has a household to come back to. New times and new ideas don't change the fundamental facts. For me, there wasn't any other course. But don't think I haven't always known that if I could have stayed at home, I should have made your father happier. If I could make my choice again, I'd only make it over if I had the same responsibilities. But that doesn't mean that I've enjoyed it and it doesn't mean I haven't often wondered . . ."

It was impossible to think of her as wondering. Since Meg could remember, when had she seen her mother dubious or perplexed for longer than an instant? Nor could she recall any brooding over the long hours of toil that had meant the sacrifice of so much else. Still their two cases weren't at all alike.

"But you were married when you started in to work," Meg said. "That makes a difference, doesn't it?"

"Yes," her mother said. "It makes one difference and one difference only. No man you care about will have to feel humiliated. But say that we suppose you truly mean to get a job. When you're so young and inexperienced, who'd take you? What do you think you'd get to do?"

"Anything that anybody'd let me do." It did seem to Meg that once she landed in New York, her Bryn Mawr degree should lead the way to many opportunities. "Carola's written to me that she'd help. I can stay with her while she tries to get me into Greenwich House. If she can get me in, I can earn my board by teaching English to the immigrants. I shouldn't mind at all. That's not what bothers me."

"Nothing bothers you. Not anything."

"That truly isn't so," Meg faltered. "I have to think of all the money that you've spent on me. I should be making some returns."

"No, you shouldn't be making some returns. I've never asked for them. I've never hoped for them. Neither has your father. That's not how parents should regard their children." Her mother was now speaking proudly. "But I don't want you living in New York in all sorts of dreadful, slummy places with no one looking after you. I can't bring myself to help you do it."

Safely tucked away was the small bank book with the hundred dollars that Grandpa had accumulated bit by bit.

"You won't have to help me out with an allowance. I have money of my own," Meg said.

On went the old, old tussle between wills that locked against each other.

"It isn't any use," Meg interrupted. "I've got to find out what it's like to be dependent on myself for everything. Even if it's risky, I've still got to try it. And once you told me not to put things into words because they had a way of hurting. Need we do it any longer?"

"Have you thought of how you're going to hurt your father?"

That, as her mother knew, was the worst weapon and the last she had to use.

But Meg had risen to the challenge. Very slowly she was going up the flight of stairs that grew ruby-colored where it ended underneath the stained-glass skylight. Slowly she was passing by the bedroom door with the white china handle. With no more than the slightest knock, she was in the study where the windows made square pictures of the elm boughs. How seldom she had been here in these recent weeks.

With his back to her, there sat her father at his microscope. From his absorption she could tell that his eye was at the lens and that he was busy with some plants of the rare sort that botanists still sent him in spite of his retirement. As she perched herself up on the stool beside him, before her on his cluttered table was the space that he had given to her years ago.

"Daddy," she began. "I've come to talk about a real experiment. It's one I'm going to make and you won't like it. Mother hates it. Already I've blown up the family peace. I've shivered it to bits."

"Think we two could get things back in shape?" he asked as he laid down his work at once. "When you were a little girl, we seemed to understand each other."

"But that was in your world," Meg said. "I suppose for you it was as big as big could be and full of problems that you couldn't solve. But for me it was so very simple. It held just a green skunk cabbage and a leech in a glass jar and my little shell up on the window shelf. There was the pitcher-plant and there was the Wardian case that housed the garter snake that you brought home for me. That world was fun. Mine isn't. I've been trying awfully hard to be exactly like that garter snake and make a hidden coil among the ferns, but it doesn't seem to be my business to deceive."

She had won his interest, but she had to go on very clearly with his kind of language.

"Years ago," she started, "sometimes you took me up to Princeton with you in September before college opened. We used to go, just you and I together, and it was the nicest trip we took. Nicest of all was climbing Mount Wachusett with you, and not because I was so proud to make the climb or wished to reach the top and see the view. When we were nearly there, we stopped at a cold black lake with white mist rising off it. Then if we scuffled back the leaves, and were very lucky, we uncovered a small bright orange newt. It was by that lake that you first explained protective coloring and the way the occasional lack of it was a great puzzle to you."

"Well?" Meg heard him ask as though he knew she hadn't reached the real significance.

"Well," she said, "in Providence I don't seem to have the least bit of protective coloring. I'm just awfully orange, Daddy. I'm as naked-orange as that newt, and some people keep on scuffling back the leaves. That's why I feel I have to get away."

"Get away? You mean from home?" His voice was making it much worse than she'd expected.

"I don't want to get away from you," she said, "and not from Mother, really, or from anybody in this house. Not, at least, for good and all. But I can't marry Harold Hammond. He only wants to tone me down to prove he can. He'd like to show that he could

make me change to shades he thinks are more conservative. And then there's Dr. Bogert."

"Dr. Bogert. He seems a little old to notice . . ."

"Daddy," Meg broke in. "You were a little old and yet you noticed Mother, only that you did it very differently. You never noticed any girl in the way that Dr. Bogert does. You'd never try to make her feel more orange than she truly was."

"There are many men who do," her father said, "though where you're concerned I'd rather Dr. Bogert wasn't one of them."

"Gid is the only one who likes me as I am; exactly as I am. He quarrels with me, but he doesn't try to change me. Daddy, I'm going to New York and it isn't just because I wish to work. It's true I do. I'd like to prove what I was worth at something besides dawdling. That's a discovery worth making, isn't it? But the truth is that I'm scared to stay here. I'm scared of what will happen to me if I stay here idling and seeing someone I'm afraid of."

"Then it's time for you to go." He spoke without a moment's hesitation, "I don't like this brand new woman's world. I'm far too old to see its beauty or its charm. All the same I trust my daughter to its perils. They're less than those of an unhappy marriage and they're less than those of idling. I could wish that you had someone to depend on."

"I have," Meg said. "Gid's in New York. He's in the background if I need him."

"That at any rate is something. Is he never to stride forth?"

"Daddy, he can't. You know why he can't. There isn't any use in wishing otherwise. But sometimes I think if I were Gid, I wouldn't worry half so much about only being in the background. A background lasts and goes on lasting. If he cares that much, maybe he's chosen the best place of all. I shouldn't wonder if he was the one I'd turn to all my life."

THE END.

Margaret Emerson Bailey's story of her own girlhood in Rhode Island around the turn of the century offers a delightful picture of the times and of a sensitive, intelligent child growing to womanhood in the midst of an eccentric but entertaining household. "Meg" resented the stifling conventions of the Providence society of her day and she scorned the way her own family clung to its fading prestige. For years she tried to compromise with it, but at last, like Nora in Ibsen's "Doll's House," she slammed the door forever on that proud world and set out to build for herself a new, unfettered life.

Sharing her adventure in growing up was a group of persons as individual as any in a novel. There was meek and gentle Grandpa Simmons, living in a world of silence and Scriptural musings from which he rarely emerged; Grandma Simmons, strong-willed, quarrelsome and pathetically proud; Father, lovable and romantic, with an absorption in *flora* and *fauna* which brought

him only condemnation from those who thought the management of a mill not becoming to a man with a family; Mother, a botany professorship at Brown University; Mother, the planner and manager of the household, whose kindergarten teaching and textbook editing kept the Bailey raft afloat; and a vast array of relatives, friends and acquaintances who influenced Meg's life who, together, made up a rich and varied background to her experience.

Although it is told in the third person and reads like a novel, this is an unaltered account of Margaret Bailey's childhood and youth—in the house on Cushing Street, at Bryn Mawr, the summers at Little Compton and at Point, her year at the University of Chicago, and her return to Providence where an unexpected decision brought to a close this chapter in her life.

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